

THE ARGOSY.

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LADY GRACE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIII.

AT GREAT WHITTON.

THE trees at Great Whitton grew bright with the tender green of spring, and the hedges were budding into leaf. Gertrude Baumgarten was slowly walking through one of the country lanes towards Avon House, enjoying the freshness of the morning. The sun shone, the skies were blue and unclouded, the air felt warm almost as that of a summer's day, and the birds sang with a rapture that is so exhilarating on these days when all nature is springing into new life and beauty.

Gertrude had been into the village. She looked fair and lovely as ever; more lovely, perhaps, than her mother had looked before her, for her face was a less proud one. Proud enough it was, but not as Lady Grace's had been; and latterly Gertrude's had assumed a somewhat sad expression, as if she were not altogether as happy as of o'd.

Leaning over the small wicket which was placed only a few yards from the large iron gates at Avon House, stood Lord Avon, looking at her as she advanced. He had been living at his place all the spring, and his sister, Lady Grace, with her daughter, Gertrude, had for the last few weeks been staying with him. The Earl was the same good-natured man he had ever been, and looked very little altered. His locks were more scanty than of yore, and a few silver threads might be seen amongst them, but in all else he appeared unchanged.

"You are back at last, Gertrude!"

"At last?" she repeated. "Why? Have you wanted me, Uncle Avon?"

"Not at all. But I have been watching for you for an age. What are you carrying in that small parcel?"

"Feminine matters in which you can scarcely be interested," laughed Gertrude. "I've been matching silks in the village for my screen work, and it took me a long time, for I wanted many shades. Then, I went on to see old Mrs. Whittaker, who grows more deaf and crotchety day by day."

Lord Avon opened the gate for Gertrude, and she passed through. She now stood by his side, whilst he, leaning over it as before, appeared to be gazing at the far distance.

"Are you watching for someone else, Uncle Henry?"

"No," replied Lord Avon; "I was only thinking, Gertrude. I am going down to the Rectory presently; your mother wants me to ask them to come in to dinner."

"Oh, pray do," said Gertrude. "It will make it less dull for them, and for us —. I wish you would tell me something," she continued, after a pause.

"Well? What do you want to know?" he enquired, certain in his own mind as to the nature of her request.

"The letter you were reading at the breakfast-table—I chanced to see the writing, you remember, and said it was from Charles; upon which you put it hastily into your pocket, telling me that I saw too much and too quickly. It *was* from Charles, was it not?"

"Yes. You were quite right."

"Then why did you rush it away in that fashion, and pretend that I was mistaken, Uncle Henry?"

"Because I wished not to draw your mother's attention to it. I did not altogether understand the letter, and wanted to go over it again alone. Charley has been getting into a mess."

"What sort of a mess?" asked Gertrude.

"All sorts of messes," replied his lordship. "He was seen at the play one night in strange company. Again, the old Bishop of Denham, calling at his chambers, found some very unorthodox pen-and-ink sketches on his blotting-pad. Charley forthwith went down in his lordship's estimation, and lost some work the Bishop had just offered him. I should like to have seen the good man's face," broke off Lord Avon, laughing.

"But is that all?" asked Gertrude. "It does not seem a very terrible affair, if there is nothing more behind it."

"It certainly sounds rather like a case of *Much ado about nothing*," assented the Earl: "But it is not quite all. Charles has been going in largely for jewellery, and can't, or won't, pay for it."

"It is very unlike Charles to do that," said Gertrude.

"The singular point in it is that Charles altogether denies it," continued Lord Avon. "He protests to me that he has not done anything of the kind; and thinks that someone must have been personating him, either in jest or else as an out-and-out fraud."

"Is the bill for jewellery a heavy one?"

"Nearly a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds!" exclaimed Gertrude. "I cannot believe it. What is your own opinion, Uncle Henry? Do you think Charley has done all this, or that someone—as he calls it—has been personating him?"

"Shouldn't care to go too closely into that question," said his easy lordship. "Shouldn't have the smallest doubt upon the point myself, but for one thing; Charley has hitherto been the very quintessence of truth and honour."

"Of course he is, and always has been, and always will be," cried Grace, warmly. "He is not likely to change now. Uncle Avon, Charles would never buy jewellery that he could not pay for. As to the play—I suppose they mean that he went to it with some fast young men—perhaps had been dining with them. I dare say he couldn't help himself."

"That's just it," said Lord Avon. "It is so easy for young fellows living in London to slide unconsciously into debt and all manner of trouble—. Do you see that hill?" he added, pointing a little way to the left.

"Whitton Beacon? Yes. But what has that to do with Charley?"

"When I was a youngster, I and some other lads used to go to the top of that mound, and slide down it. Once off, no earthly power could have stopped us until we reached the bottom. So is it with young fellows like Charley; once in for a thing, it is almost impossible to pull up. In this instance I dare say he bought chains and rings at different times, never pausing to think that in the end the sum would mount up to a formidable item."

"Does he ask you to help him? Is that his reason for writing?"

"Not at all. He distinctly disowns any motive of the kind; does not intend to pay the bill himself, or to allow anyone else to pay it for him. He says he knows that Dr. Dynevor is about to acquaint me with the whole affair, and wishes to give me first of all his own version of it. Amongst other changes, the engagement with Mary is broken off."

"But that is serious," exclaimed Gertrude, much troubled. "It will ruin both their lives. Who has done it?"

"Dr. Dynevor, and on account of these matters. I'm sorry for Charley, and suppose I must see into it," concluded the Earl, passing at length through the gate. "If I find he has imposed this fine tale of innocence upon me, I shall be more angry with him than I ever was before in my life. Don't speak of it to your mother, Gertrude. Now I must be off to the Rectory."

He walked away. Gertrude went slowly up the garden and crossed to a natural arbour formed by the interlacing trees, and there sat down on a bench overshadowed by the flowering lilac and drooping laburnum. Removing her straw hat, and letting it hang from her arm by its long blue streamers, she began to think of Charles. She wished Lord Avon had shown her the letter; but he had declined

to do so. A faint sound of voices came to her through the open window of the drawing-room; someone must have called and was talking with her mother.

"Perhaps it is Mr. Brice," she thought, alluding to the old doctor, who was attending Lady Grace. "He must be back from London, I think. He ran up for a few hours, he said, and that's two days ago." But it was not on Mr. Brice, or on anyone else likely to call, that Gertrude's mind lingered; it was on this new trouble of Charles's, and what it might or might not involve in the future.

"If she and Charles should part for good, would Everard return to her?" shyly wondered Gertrude, with flushing cheeks. "He said—Why—Who is this?"

She half rose in her astonishment. Strolling down the broad path from the house came Sir Everard Wilmot. Could it be he? Gertrude gazed as one in a dream.

He went as far as the little gate, over which she and Lord Avon had recently been leaning, stood there for a minute looking out, and then returned. When opposite Gertrude's arbour, he caught sight of the soft folds of a muslin dress, and turned quickly. Gertrude felt greatly agitated. Sir Everard walked across the lawn, and held out his hand.

"I am so much surprised," she said, as her own hand met his, and her lovely face turned to rose colour. "I had not even heard that you were expected."

"I came down from London this morning," he answered, as he took his seat beside her. "When Avon was last in town he invited me to come to him for a day or two. Having nothing particularly on hand just now, I thought the occasion too good to be lost."

He paused, looking earnestly at Gertrude, who felt her nervousness increasing.

"You are not sorry to see me, Miss Baumgarten?"

"Oh, no; why should I be sorry?" fluttered Gertrude. "We must all be glad to see you, for it is dull here. I often wish myself away."

"Are *you* glad to see me?" he asked more pointedly.

"Oh yes! I am—very glad," said Gertrude, hesitating, and again blushing violently. "And mamma and Uncle Avon will be especially so."

A moment's silence. Then Sir Everard took possession of the hand again, and bent a little forward, his face, slightly agitated, turned to hers.

"I am given to plain speaking, as you may remember, Gertrude; I cannot beat about the bush with fine phrases, as some men can," he said. "My dear, I came here to-day with one sole object—that of asking you to be my wife. Oh, Gertrude! don't say me nay again!"

She bent her head and her changing face, but gave him no other answer.

"Don't you care for me, Gertrude?" he continued, sadly. "Cannot you care for me?"

And, what with surprise, perplexity and agitation, Miss Baumgarten lost all her dignity, and burst into tears.

Somehow he did not regard it as a bad omen. Perhaps he was an expert at interpreting signs and tokens. However that might be, he put his arm round her and drew her gently to him.

"My darling!" he whispered with impassioned fervour. "I see that you will not send me away." And Gertrude bent her face still lower as she murmured:

"Perhaps you have not heard?—Mary Dynevor and Charles—their engagement is broken off."

He gathered her meaning at once.

"Gertrude, don't you know me better than that?" he rejoined. "Did you not know, did you not see in the past days, that it was not Mary Dynevor I loved, but you? When you refused me, refused even to listen to a word I would have spoken, I turned to Mary in—I fear I must say it—vexation of soul. My dear, why did you treat me so?"

Should she ever be able to tell him? Not yet, at any rate. She had mistaken his frequent visits to the sick daughter of a lady staying in the place, friends of her own and of Lady Grace. A foolish, gossiping woman had whispered to Gertrude that Mr. Wilmot was paying so much attention to this young sick lady that their engagement was an absolute certainty. Gertrude believed it, and became at once so resentfully jealous that when Mr. Wilmot, not long afterwards, spoke to her, in her pride she retaliated upon him with indignation. No, she could not tell him all this to-day, or speak of the sore repentance which had ever since lain upon her.

She drew herself to the end of the bench, put her hat on decorously, and essayed to converse upon indifferent topics: the beauty of the day, the scent of the lilac, the song of the birds. "Do you see that laburnum?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said. "It is my favourite tree; the most beautiful of all trees; the most graceful of all blossoms."

"Yes," he replied; "I almost agree with you. The country people call it 'gold chain' down with us," he added, smiling.

"Down with you?"

"In the county where my home is; the fairest county in the heart of England. Soon to be your home also, I hope, Gertrude. My darling, may the chains that bind our future lives together be as fair and golden as those of your favourite blossom."

"Does Uncle Henry know you are here?" she suddenly asked.

"Why, of course he does. I was with him for half-an-hour before he went out."

"I wonder he did not tell me you were here."

"He no doubt thought he would leave it for me to tell you. I

have his best wishes, Gertrude ; and your mother's also. Ah, my dear, you can find no excuse for turning from me now."

Gertrude rose. He placed her hand on his arm and they walked together up the path. Lady Grace looked at them from the window with a smile of welcome. Sir Everard nodded to her.

A remembrance rushed into Lady Grace's heart, and a flood of tears to her eyes. Just so, in that very garden, in the days long gone by, had *she* loved and listened. Listened and loved and yielded to the impassioned vows of him who had alone made a heaven of her life—Gertrude's father, Ryle Baumgarten.

CHAPTER XIV.

SURPRISES.

HAND locked in hand, they stood together in the dusk of evening at the chambers in Pump Court, gazing into one another's eyes—Cyras and Charles Baumgarten.

It was the evening after Charles's ignominious exit from the house of Dr. Dynevor. He had been busy all day ; had been in court, the junior counsel in an insignificant case ; had made one at a consultation at Lincoln's Inn ; had been occupied in other ways. The only personal thing he had found time to do for himself was to write the letter spoken of in the last chapter to Lord Avon. And now, the day's work over, and his dinner over, he was mentally deliberating as to whether he should at once apply to the police for counsel in his curious dilemma, or wait and see what the next day or two would bring forth—when he heard the sound of a visitor approaching.

A gentleman of free and easy manners had run up the stairs to the door which bore on it the name of "Mr. Charles Baumgarten." Knocking with the silver head of his very elegant cane, he had stood humming a tune until the summons was answered by the boy, Joe. "Master in ?" he cried airily, and walked forward without waiting for a reply, as if he knew his way about the chambers as well as Joe himself did. The boy stared in amazement ; he had never seen two people so much alike as this gentleman and his master.

"Charley, lad !" Joe heard him say in salutation.

The resemblance was certainly wonderful. Height, figures, features, even the voices were the same. Only in the expression of the two countenances a difference might be seen. That of Cyras was gay, light, laughing, as if he had never in his whole life heard of a thing called care ; that of Charles was thoughtful and rather sad. And their resemblance to their late father, the Dean of Denham, was as great as it was to one another.

"Don't you know me, Charley ?"

Intense surprise had struck Charles dumb.

"Yes, I know you, Cyras, my brother; but I can't believe yet that it is really you."

"There's no mistaking the likeness," laughed Cyras. "Look at yourself in the glass, and then look at me. Folks might vow we were twins. You are silent with surprise, Charley."

"I am more than surprised: I am bewildered. Sit down. How long have you been in England?"

"A few weeks. But most of it has been spent in Paris, not in England. I've been sticking to work like a brick for a long time, and I thought I had earned a holiday; so I came over to the old country, to see you all. When I arrived I found you had all flown in different directions: you gone on circuit, and Berkeley Square shut up."

"They are staying at Great Whitton with Uncle Avon. You should have sent us word that you were coming, Cyras."

"I couldn't. I steamed away from Wellington the very same day that I made up my mind to come over. The fact is, Charley, I—but I need not bother you by going into everything," added Cyras. "How is the dear mother?"

"Quite well."

"And Gertrude? Is she as pretty as ever? Any chance of her getting spliced?"

"You should keep Colonial terms for Colonial life," quoth Charles. "Spliced!"

"All right," promptly returned Cyras. "Is there any prospect of the fair Miss Baumgarten's being led to the hymeneal altar?"

Charles stopped his ears. "That's worse, Cyras!" And they both laughed.

"Answer my question, Charley. What of Gertrude?"

"Well, I—can't say anything for certain," hesitated Charles. "But I should not very much wonder if we heard of a wedding before very long."

Cyras became serious. He was aroused to interest in his sister, of whom he had always been especially fond. "I hope it's something good, Charley."

"Good in every way, if it turn out to be fact. Plenty of money, and an admirable man. He likes her, I think, and she—more than likes him. It is Everard Wilmot."

"Everard Wilmot," repeated Cyras, in surprise. "Once attached to the embassy in Paris?"

"The same."

"I know him, then. He'll do."

"How can you have known him?" asked Charles. "He was in Paris only for a short time and it's ever so many years ago. You must have been about seventeen."

"Not quite as young as that, Charley. I took a flying escapade without leave, over to Paris, with John Sherron, angering—" his face flushed, and he spoke in a low tone and with deep feeling—

"my dear father. You knew nothing of it; you were at Eton: Gertrude knew, and so did Lady Grace. In Paris I saw Wilmot, but did not become acquainted with him."

"You don't know much of him, then."

"Wait a bit. Not much; no. After that—later—Wilmot was over in Wellington, where I did make his acquaintance. What's more, I was able to render him a service, which I know he has not forgotten to this day."

"What was it?"

"Don't ask me, Charley, for I can't tell you. I promised him then I would never speak of it, and I never shall. Not that there was anything dishonourable to him in the affair, but the contrary. If Gertrude has chosen him, she has done well."

"There's nothing certain about it yet, I fancy. Only, a hint was whispered to me that——*Cyras!*" burst out Charles, as an idea flashed across him. "It was you who came to my rooms here the night before last! It was you who pilfered the key from my old laundress."

Cyras nodded. "I took the key from her hand, and let myself in with it. The woman took mē for you; I saw that and kept up the joke. And when I got in, Charley, I found only empty rooms; no one to welcome me."

"But you need not have played up Old Harry with them, *Cyras*; turned the drawers inside out, and ornamented the blotting-pad to the Bishop of Denham's pious horror and my own confusion."

"The blotting-pad! Oh, I left that as a memento of my visit; I had no card-case with me," laughed *Cyras*. "And for the drawers, I had only a fancy, Charley, for seeing what you kept in your lockers."

"You know the Bishop of Denham?"

"I ought to do so. He used to read me lectures an hour long. I remember he once told my father that he ought to keep over me the severe rod of correction."

"Well, he was here the next morning early, and in all innocence I gave him the blotting-pad to use. You may, perhaps, fancy his looks, and his opinion of me, when those sinful sketches met his outraged eyes."

Charles thought his brother never would cease laughing. It was the best joke, he declared, that he had heard for many a day.

"But there are other things, *Cyras*," Charles resumed, "and they are not trifles. You have been forging my name to a bill."

All the mirth in the elder's face gave place to astonishment. "Forged your name to a bill!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," returned Charles.

"I declare most solemnly that I have never done anything of the kind, Charley. You may put down as much folly to me as you will; but—*forgery!* You are dreaming, lad."

"You bought a lot of jewellery from a man named White," continued Charles, who, of course, was no longer at any loss to know who had so mysteriously personated him. "You paid him by a bill, purporting to be accepted by me. And you ——"

"But the bill's not due?" hastily interrupted Cyras, lifting his head in surprise.

"It was due a day or two ago, and ——"

"By Jove! I made no memorandum of the date. How time flies!"

"But why did you attach my name to it?"

"I signed it with my own name, 'C. Baumgarten.' I made it payable here, for I had no settled address in London, with all of you out of it, north, south, east and west. By Jove! that bill due! They didn't bring it to you, did they?"

"Of course they brought it to me, believing it was mine. And I disowned it, and it's not paid yet; and there's I don't know what work about it. It was a pretty close imitation of my handwriting, Cy."

"It was my own handwriting, and no imitation of anyone else's. I wrote my name as I always do, and always have done. As we are alike in person, Charles, so we are in writing. You know it."

"You have given me little opportunity of knowing it of late," was the reply. "It must be months since you wrote to me, Cyras."

"I've made your letters to me do duty for both of us," returned the free-and-easy Cyras; "and have sent you one of our splendid newspapers in return. I have no end of business letters to write now, besides looking after the shipping; so that when the day comes to an end I don't care to set to work again."

"You seem to have taken quite a business turn," remarked Charles, only half believing in his brother's industry.

"I took that a long time ago. It's a positive fact, Charley. They are going to give me a share in the concern."

"Who are?"

"Brice and Jansen. Anyway, they talk of it."

"And what about this bill, Cyras?"

"Oh, I'll see to it," said Cyras, airily. "Don't let it bother your head, lad."

It seemed that he did not allow it to bother his own. Seated back in Charley's easiest chair, his legs stretched out to the blaze—for the evening was chilly, and a fire had been kindled—Cyras lighted a small meerschau, with which he had come provided, and held it between his complacent lips.

"One can't do long without one's smoke," he remarked. "Hope you don't mind it up here, Charley?"

"Not after business hours," laughed Charles. "Have you any more bills out, Cyras?"

"One more."

"And made payable here?"

Cyras nodded.

"And what is the amount?"

"Can't remember. A hundred pounds or so. It's a Bond Street tailor. I was obliged to have a regular rig-out. Colonial tailors don't do for London."

Charles Baumgarten recalled a rumour he had heard about a month before—that whispered enquiries were being made as to his finances.

"Cyras, do you want to ruin me?" he cried, in a startled tone. "I must take up these bills if you do not."

"Take up the bills!" echoed Cyras. "What for? You did not accept them."

"But the people think I did."

"Rubbish! Let them think what they like. I'll go with you to the parties, and show myself, and convict them of their error. Charley, lad, what a long face you are drawing! Just as you used to do when we were young boys and I led you into a scrape. Didn't I always get you out of it then? And I'll get you out of this. In fact, you are not in it."

"How will you get me out of it?"

"By paying the bills myself. I'll settle all up before leaving England."

"Why not pay at once?"

"Can't," lightly returned Cyras. "Money runs away over here; it simply melts in Paris. I brought about three hundred pounds with me, and it's all gone. I've telegraphed out to old Brice to send me more."

"Why did you not pay the jeweller at the time you bought his goods?"

"The bill came to so much more than I had thought for, and I hadn't enough in my pocket. Oh, it's all right, old fellow."

"And pray, Cyras, if I may put so bold a question, for whom were all those pretty things bought?"

"For one and another. Some for myself. Some for Gertrude. Some to send out to Wellington."

"For Gertrude?"

"To be sure. I'm keeping them all for her. Having left Wellington so hastily I was not able to lay in a stock of presents, so I got some over here. And I got some for Mrs. Carington."

"Who on earth is she?"

"Our purser's wife. She made the passage with him this time, to pay a visit to his folks in London. Good-hearted people, both of them, and made as much of me on board as if I had been a lord. The ship is chartered by Brice and Jansen, you know, Charley."

"Then you will go with me to these people about the bills, Cyras—the jeweller and the tailor?" resumed Charles, after a pause.

"I'll go now, if you like. I don't want to let you in for annoyance, brother mine."

"You have let me in for a good deal of that already, Cyras. Were you at the Haymarket two or three nights ago?"

"Yes."

"And there you were taken for me. Who was the lady? It was half over London the next day that I had been there in suspicious company."

"What a joke!" exclaimed Cyras, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and putting it up.

"You may look upon it as a good joke, Cyras, but it has half ruined me," said Charles with some bitterness.

"I knew I was being taken for you, Charley," laughed Cyras, carelessly. "Some fellows nodded to me, and one or two spoke, and I nodded back again and kept up the jest."

"A sorry jest for me, Cyras. I was engaged to be married—to Mary Dynevor."

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it," cried Cyras, stretching out his hand to grasp his brother's. "Mary was the nicest of all the younger girls; as nice as Cyrilla."

"I said *was* engaged, Cyras. It is broken off now. Old Miss Dynevor saw me, as she thought, at the Haymarket with someone I had no business to be with; and she went home and told the Sub-dean. The next time I called in Eaton Place he turned me out of doors, and bade me think no more of his daughter."

Cyras suddenly became serious. "This has gone farther than I intended," he cried. "All my life I have been getting myself or others into scrapes, and I suppose I shall do so to the end of the chapter. And the best and the worst of it is that I generally manage to come out in worse colours than I deserve: as on this occasion."

Charles looked up. "Have they been traducing you as well as me?" he asked.

"The lady I treated to the theatre was no other than Mrs. Carington: as good a woman as ever lived, although, as Tony Lumpkin would say, her cheeks are as broad and red as a pulpit cushion. But it is all genuine colour, Charley, just as she herself is a genuine woman."

"What brought you there alone with her?" asked Charles.

"That I was with her alone was an accident," answered Cyras. "I treated them to the Haymarket, and took three of the best seats. At the last moment, just as we were about to start in the cab, Carington's old father came in to spend the evening, and he had to remain with him."

"I think you were imprudent, to say the least of it," laughed Charles. "The lady was wonderfully got up, I was told."

"Like all born colonists, she is fond of any amount of fans and feathers," returned Cyras. "It was her first introduction to a

London theatre, and a great occasion to her, and she put on all her war paint accordingly. But of other paint she had none, Charley: she is too honest and good for that."

"Where are the Caringtons staying?"

"With his brother. He's a widower, and lives at a pretty house, up Chelsea way. Decent, intelligent people, Charley; though, of course, not up to your mark."

"And where are you staying, Cyras?"

"I! You may well ask it, mon frère. Finding no home open to me on landing, the first individual I dropped upon, after leaving the ship at the docks, was Harry Brice. He is in Somerset House, you know; getting on, too; and was bound that morning on some expedition to the Customs. He told me you were on circuit; thought the mother and Gertrude were at Avon, and said I must come to them at Norwood. Down I went. But Norwood's out of the way for a fellow who wants to knock about town, and I came back to an hotel. Then I went to Paris with Tom Howard—you know Tom Howard, Charley?"

"Don't I! Spends all before him, and does no work."

Cyras laughed. "I met him accidentally one morning. He said he was off to Paris that evening, and I agreed to go with him. And here I am back again. And now you know all, Charley."

"Quite enough too," laughed Charley. "We'll go to White's now. And Cyras agreed with alacrity.

The jeweller's shop was lighted when they reached it. Mr. White and his assistant were both in it. Charles walked forward; Cyras held back a moment.

"I hear that bill is protested, Mr. White," began Charles.

"Yes, sir, or about to be," answered the jeweller. "And I must say I am surprised that a gentleman like yourself should allow things to come to such a pass. If it was not convenient to you to pay it now, you might have renewed it."

"I tell you again, as I told you before, that the bill is none of mine," said Charles. "I never bought the articles."

"I say that you did, sir, and that the bill is yours," returned White, showing temper for the first time. "To deny it is a paltry subterfuge which a gentleman in your position should be above——"

Charles interrupted. "You would swear to me before the Lord Mayor, I suppose?"

"Before all the Lord Mayors in the three kingdoms and the corporations, too," retorted White, now thoroughly roused. "If you ——"

Cyras walked forward and stood beside his brother.

"Look at this gentleman," said Charles Baumgarten.

The jeweller gazed in amazement, now at one, now at the other. "What does it mean?" he cried at last. "Who are you, sir?" turning to Cyras.

"Well," cried Cyras, who looked upon the whole matter as an excellent joke; "don't you know me again?"

"You must be twins!" exclaimed the perplexed man.

"Not at all," said Cyras. "We are brothers, but not twins. I'm two years older than Mr. Charles Baumgarten."

"Sir," said the jeweller, turning to Charles, "allow me to ask why you did not explain to me that you had a brother who bore to you so remarkable a likeness? It might have solved the mystery."

"Because I never thought of him at all in the matter; I did not know he was in England. Of course, Mr. White, you now exonerate *me*."

"As if everyone did not!" exclaimed Cyras. "The trouble, Mr. White, has arisen from my careless habits. We colonists are proverbially careless, you know. Making no memorandum of the date, I did not know the bill was due. I have been spending most of the interval in Paris, where time flies, one forgets how quickly. It will be all right now, and your bill will get paid without your troubling to protest it."

They next called upon the holders of the bill, the Messrs. Jephson, who in their turn were equally surprised: the elder cynically remarking they might have had the wit to know that Cyras was at the bottom of the mischief. And then they went back to Pump Court, where Charles had ordered a substantial supper for Cyras's benefit.

"We don't go in much for eight o'clock dinners, over in New Zealand," remarked Cyras, "but we make up for it in supper."

Then Cyras grew confidential. He spoke of a certain fair daughter of Mr. Jansen, the second partner in the New Zealand house. She and Cyras were privately engaged; and he declared that if he could only win her he should throw carelessness to the winds and become as steady as Old Time.

"Her mother, a well-born Englishwoman, favours it," observed Cyras. "She thinks there must be any amount of latent good in a Dean's son. Mr. Jansen opposes it: not that he objects to me personally, but on the score of my want of prospects. He told me point-blank that he would give her to me were I able to become a partner in the firm."

"The difficulty is money, I suppose, Cyras?"

"Just so. Four thousand pounds. They would give me a small share in it for that sum."

"And you have not got it?"

"I have never saved anything."

"And what of the young lady herself?"

"I only wish it rested with her!" answered Cyras. "She would soon be mine. Ah, Charley, if I could only encompass that partnership, it would make a good man of me and steady me for life. If I have to part from her—well I don't think I should much care what went with me, or what the end was—perhaps ruin."

Charles was silent. He remembered how passionately he and Cyras had loved each other as boys, although Cyras did put upon him and tyrannize over him; and he asked himself whether he should give up his own marriage for a time, and save his brother. He had about two thousand pounds put by; part of it he had saved by degrees, part had come to him by a recent legacy. If he gave that to Cyras, his own marriage must be delayed, but he knew Mary would wait for him. It would be a grievous disappointment to both of them: but should disappointment be placed in comparison with his friendless brother's welfare—his welfare in this world, and, it might be, in that to come? The other two thousand would no doubt be managed amongst them—possibly by Lord Avon.

"You have not told me her name, Cyras."

"Anna. Anna Jansen. To me the prettiest name in the world. Ah, Charley, if you only knew her!"

Charles fell into deep thought. When supper was over, Cyras brought out his meerschaum again. It was nearly one o'clock when he took his departure. Charles went down the stairs with him.

"You have not told me where you are staying, Cyras."

"Here, there and everywhere. Just now I am at the Tavistock. Good-night, Charley boy: à demain."

Charles released his hand, and stood a moment to watch him away. Cyras broke into a song as he crossed the flags, regaling the slumbers of Pump Court with the sentiments of the renowned Mr. Paul Clifford:

"Oh, there never was life like the robber's,
So jolly, so bold, so free!
And its end? Why, a cheer from the crowd below,
And a leap from a leafless tree."

(To be continued.)



A MARRIAGE FROM THE STAGE.

"NOW that we are comfortably seated round the fire, our poet and critic, Mr. Smith, will give us his edition of Mrs. Raughan's story. You are wanting to hear it I am sure, if anything may be judged from the attention you give to her portrait over the piano," said our hostess.

I had indeed been looking with unusual interest at the picture to which Mrs. Fitzgerald referred. It represented a dark woman in Greek dress, whose black waving hair fell low over her brow, contrasting strangely with the pallor of her face. Bending slightly forward, she was clasping her hands upon her knees in the attitude of a listener. Owing to their expression, her eyes struck me more than any other feature in the beautiful face before me. They were neither very large nor very bright, but I have rarely seen command and beseeching united in one glance as I saw them there. The picture seemed to be the embodiment of some idea, some legend or story I had read. The face was too spirituelle for a Sappho, and too pensive for a Muse of Tragedy, but as I turned away at the bidding of our hostess my thoughts flew back to that old tale of "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*."

I took my seat in the circle round the fire, where I could glance now and then at the fair Italian, and observe how she took this blazoning abroad of her unhappy secrets. "She will have justice from me," I thought as I turned my eyes upon the so-called poet, who, with a confident smile, was drawing a small MS. from his pocket.

"Much of what I relate," began Smith, "was gathered from the gossip of the old housekeeper who was in the service of the Raughans. A small pocket-book, carefully preserved among the family archives, and which contains some letters and notes belonging to Gabriel di Vilna, has furnished me with important facts; but I had to do more than merely gather these facts together. As I had promised to put the whole into shape as a complete story, I found it necessary to imagine much that might and indeed must have passed through the minds of the principal actors in this tragedy."

Here Smith unfolded his MS. and solemnly began, and I glanced up at Mrs. Raughan, who seemed to look reproachfully down on us as she listened to her own history.

The Honourable Mrs. Arthur Raughan, born Claudia Lorelli, was well known in Florence before her marriage as a successful opera singer. I need scarcely describe to you her remarkable beauty; her picture is before you, and words of mine would not add to its effect. Unlike most actresses, Claudia was not easy to know. Proud and reserved towards strangers, she dreaded that impertinent interference

and that insulting bonhomme with which prosperous mediocrity is ever ready to tease the genius forced to gain its daily bread in full view of the public. When one night at the Theatre Royal a certain Gabriel di Vilna was planning afresh a visionary introduction to the object of his worship, he little dreamed that the handsome, light-haired Englishman whose head protruded from the next box was Claudia's accepted lover, and that the oath he was swearing again and again in his native Italian would soon be converted into an unconscious perjury.

So when the long-coveted introduction was to have taken place, and the goddess brought down from her pedestal, di Vilna learned to his bitter disappointment that only the day before the beautiful prima donna had broken her engagement with the manager of the Theatre Royal, and was on her way to England as Mrs. Arthur Raughan.

The two runaways came to The Limes direct from Italy, as the leaves were falling from the trees and the chilly autumn winds moaning round the house.

"I have chosen between you and a great career, Arthur," whispered Claudia, as Raughan helped his wife out of the carriage and led her into her new home.

"You shall never repent your choice," returned Arthur, smiling.

"No?" replied Claudia, looking at him and taking no notice of the new surroundings that were to become a part of her life.

"Before long you will look back upon your stage life as impossible; you will even wonder how you could have endured it," said he, looking with satisfaction round his ancestral hall.

Claudia's face shadowed slightly. "I shall always look back upon the past with respect. The expression of noble or deep emotions in music is as grand, and I sometimes think grander, than anything else in life," she said, with a half sigh.

Arthur Raughan hated arguments. "You must admire these decorations, my darling," he said. "Here are more than twenty brushes on this wall, and there is my grandfather's old sword, hung up over the portrait of the Duke of Wellington."

Claudia pressed his hand, but in spite of her newly-found love a chill crept over her.

"I will admire everything, even the weather," she said, smiling as well as she could, "only I must rest first. Remember what a long journey we have made."

As might have been expected: as Raughan's distant relatives, as his visiting acquaintances, as all his friends expected: the young man would soon find out the fatal mistake he had committed, the unwise step he had taken. An opera singer does not easily fall into the ways of the orthodox country squire's wife; she does not take naturally to distributing alms among villagers, nor does she always find herself at home on horseback full pelt after the hounds.

A life which had called all her physical activities into play,

suddenly exchanged for one of comparative inertia, would have told hardly upon her vigorous mental and emotional nature; even if she had found in her husband's companionship all that subtle sympathy which a spontaneous and ardent affection such as hers demanded as an adequate return. Even had she found this capacity for sympathy in Raughan, a sympathy of which the fox-hunting young squire was incapable, her life at the Limes would have been a sacrifice at the altar of Love.

But neither Raughan nor his friends were likely to understand this. The opera singer was to them a beautiful wild flower transplanted from a garden of thistles into a greenhouse. That a woman in Mrs. Raughan's position could ever feel a yearning regret for a lost career, a career given up in a moment of enthusiastic devotion to the man she loved, was not likely to cross the minds of these good people.

Indeed, Raughan, even in his most reflective moments, never dreamed that such a sacrifice had been made. The passion this beautiful woman felt for him was significant only as a necessary concomitant of his own happiness. No; not only was such an insight into their true mutual relations never permitted to this easy-going, shallow man, but he was inclined, after the first flush of passion was over, to think that he had behaved rather magnificently, and that, as a just reward for his generous conduct, he was possessed of a divine right to criticise his wife in her new position with the severity of Censor, and, if occasion required it, to show a little justifiable temper.

Once removed from the novel surroundings in which Arthur Raughan found himself at Florence: away from the footlights, music, stage atmosphere and the triumph of successful rivalry: the woman whom he had adored in his very limited way as a heroine of the drama, a being who, for a short time at least, had awakened the dormant capacity within him for admiration of poetry and music, here in the country seemed different. Among his congenial associations of the hunting field, she seemed gradually to lose the very principle which had quickened all his new life within him.

They had not been married three weeks when Arthur lounged into his wife's room one morning, saying, in his Southern drawl:

"I've just got an Italian valet, Claudia. He is a regular native, as dark as night, and will look well against our dining-room panels. He came with a letter from Rabone's in Florence, calls himself Gabriel, and his manners are perfect."

The new valet had not lived many days at the Limes before he had made an unusual impression upon the household. The haughty reserve with which he treated his fellow-servants engendered a secret suspicion among them, particularly fostered by the old butler, that Gabriel was a spy in the employ of some unknown, but no doubt notorious, gang of burglars, who had criminal intentions towards the

family treasures ; or, at least, an agent of some secret society which had murderous designs on the Tory master of the house. Mr. Raughan was quite sure the man would prove an invaluable servant.

Mrs. Raughan shared neither her husband's nor her servants' sentiments. She was conscious only that this inscrutable being, with his lowered eyes and his ready anticipation of her every wish : for it was he who chiefly waited on her : was watching her as narrowly as if his life depended on the discovery of her inmost thoughts. She was sure that no word or look passing between her husband and herself in his presence was unnoticed, that nothing she did or said was ever forgotten by him. When she sang, she was perfectly certain that he would be listening outside the door ; she could often hear the sound of his retreating footsteps as she left the piano. Her favourite songs she always found arranged upon the piano ready for her, and she knew that this must be the new valet's doing.

"I don't like him," Claudia once remarked to her husband. "Do you particularly wish to keep him?"

"I dislike changing servants if I can help it," replied Raughan carelessly.

He was already fairly on the way to recovery from the temporary stage fever caught in Florence ; that fever together with the American fever being the epidemics to which youthful members of the British aristocracy are supposed to be most susceptible.

Claudia shrugged her shoulders and leaned back in her chair ; she knew Arthur was not in the mood to listen patiently to any complaint of hers.

"The man does extremely well, Claudia. It would not be right to send him away without reason." Mrs. Raughan tapped her foot on the fender and held her hands towards the fire without replying.

"What a pity it is you don't ride, Claudia," Arthur began again after a moment's silence. "Hunting is the only thing to do in winter, and there is a quiet horse you can try. We can have some fellow from Rosebridge to give you lessons, and Mrs. Brunswold will give you hints ; she has the best seat of any woman in the county."

"You know I have never ridden," said Claudia, turning her eyes slowly upon him as she waved the screen that had been lying on her lap. "I am not yet used to English country life. You seem to forget sometimes what manner of life mine has been, and that violent exercise is particularly disagreeable to me."

"Very well," replied her husband, again carelessly, and the subject was dropped.

Mrs. Raughan was beginning to see that Arthur could not realise sympathetically the difference in their temperaments. She had, however, another and a very definite trial before her.

Visitors began to come ; people with whom the artist had about as much in common as a nightingale would have with a thoroughbred fox-terrier. The undisguised wonder with which they all regarded

her; the way in which they exhibited their good-natured curiosity, was trying to a sensitive and high-spirited woman. The men discoursed on the weather and the local interests very much as a modern soldier might discuss the present system of war administration with a lately revived human fossil from the ruins of Troy.

Claudia was pleasant and affable to all, but her heart was sore after Italy; she longed for the renewal of her hard but congenial life of Bohemian and singer. Her nature was strong and impulsive; she found it almost impossible to adapt herself quiescently to her surroundings, and she met with no help from those about her.

Mrs. Raughan was sitting in the room in which we are now, one afternoon in spring, when Gabriel announced Mrs. Brunswold, with that peculiar intonation which meant: "Here is the woman you dislike; I know it, and would send her away if I could."

Mrs. Brunswold was always calling, and Claudia rose with very little energy and said to the retreating valet: "Tell your master that Mrs. Brunswold is here," and there was a shadow of sarcasm in her voice.

Arthur came in, and the talk turned upon the gossip round about; the new master of the hounds, his pedigree, and whether the horse he rode at the last meet was his own or a hired hack, and such-like details of thrilling interest.

Perhaps of all her new acquaintances Claudia disliked Mrs. Brunswold the most, partly because Arthur was perpetually holding the woman up as a model of all that was admirable and pleasing. It was painful to one who was fully aware of her incapacity in this particular walk of life. And again, partly that the woman seemed to regard her—Claudia—as a mistake, as a Moloch to whom Arthur Raughan had, in a moment of folly, sacrificed his happiness.

However, Mrs. Raughan made an effort to join in the conversation; but, finding it too deep for her, she sat silently toying with her handkerchief, unconscious that she was stripping the lace off the border. Mrs. Brunswold's loud voice paused for an instant, and catching sight of Claudia's guitar, she called out in her Southern brogue:

"I've got to go in a moment, Mrs. Raughan, but do give us something with your guitar first. I am dying to hear it."

Claudia knew perfectly well that the good dame didn't know one note from another; but to please her husband's guest she smiled graciously and took the guitar from Arthur's hands.

"I don't suppose you will like the music I sing," she couldn't help saying, as she turned towards Mrs. Brunswold.

"Nonsense, Claudia; Mrs. Brunswold can appreciate anything. Sing something neither too sad nor too sentimental."

"I must sing what I know," laughed Claudia; and she began "Une Nuit d'Été."

"Thanks, very much," said Mrs. Brunswold, who didn't understand a word of any language but the Southern dialect of England.

"'Une Nuit d'Été' is a favourite song of mine," was the reply, as Mrs. Raughan rose with her visitor.

"And very charming it is! Now you really mustn't come down the drive without your hat, Mr. Raughan," the lively widow said in her loud voice as she sailed into the hall. "You'll catch a dreadful cold in that top story of yours, and your wife will have her revenge on me."

The moment Claudia lost sight of the retreating figures she returned hastily into the drawing-room, walked out upon the terrace and round by the back of the drive, where she could see them coming without being observed.

They were walking along together, laughing and talking. Arthur was flicking the air with his whip, his eyes fixed on Mrs. Brunswold's face with that characteristic look he always wore when interested and pleased; a look half inquiring, half smiling.

Almost without knowing why, Claudia bent forward to hear what they were saying.

"Wouldn't it be rather a pity to leave the Park just now?" Arthur asked his companion, just as they were within a few yards of his listening wife. The widow laughed and said something Claudia could not catch, and then her husband laughed his light merry laugh as they passed her.

There was a cold wind blowing, although the spring was far advanced. Now that the two had disappeared, Claudia became conscious that she was without a wrap, and she also began to ask herself why she had stolen out upon them, what she had expected to hear or see, and she felt angry with herself for having even for a moment assumed any possibility of rivalry with *that* woman. In spite of this argument, it displeased her to see Arthur so evidently interested in all Mrs. Brunswold's manoeuvres and so easily amused by her commonplace, loudly-delivered jokes.

But before she had formed these thoughts clearly in her mind she was aware of the approach of someone. It must be Arthur coming back some other way; how foolish she would look out in the chilly wind without hat or cloak and for no purpose whatever. But it was not Arthur; it was the confidential valet who was close upon her, holding a shawl in his hand. Claudia turned, and their eyes met for a moment.

"Pardon, Signora, but the afternoon is cold and you are exposed."

"Thank you," replied Claudia, taking the shawl from him before he had time to put it round her shoulders, and walking back to the house with a haughty, repellant air. She was vexed that the watchful man should have come upon her then; doubtless he was aware of what brought her there. She would have been still more angry had she seen the valet, a few moments before, hastily picking up from

the drawing-room floor the ill-used pocket-handkerchief, kiss it, and put it carefully in one of his pockets, before catching up a shawl and following his mistress.

That evening Raughan remarked: "We—you—must be dull here, Claudia; a little excitement would do you good. I think of taking you up to town for a month or so, and looking up my old friends there. What do you say?"

Claudia felt as if a weight were lifted off her heart. Here was her husband proposing to take her away from that woman! After all, he could not be so fond of her society!

"Mrs. Brunswold is going at the end of the month," Arthur added, with his usual want of taste. Detestable woman! Mrs. Raughan remembered the scrap of conversation she had overheard. Arthur might surely have done without the widow's society for a short time; he had met her a hundred times already in the hunting field.

"Well?" asked Raughan, raising his eyebrows. "What do you say, Claudia?"

"I am not used to English society," murmured she. "I should even prefer remaining here." And a tear stood on her lashes.

"Even here!" echoed Raughan. "It seems to me that your reply to all questions is the same: 'I am not used to this or that!' I wish you would get used to something." And he got up and made towards the door, frowning petulantly.

The pent-up anguish of Claudia's soul burst out at last. For more than three months she had been almost neglected by him; and after all he had promised, after all she had sacrificed!

"You are tired of me, Arthur," she exclaimed impetuously, rushing to the root of the matter with the determination of real despair. "I cannot bear this systematic coldness."

She placed her hand upon the door and held the other towards him. If this appeal had been made in Florence, in those bright and happy days when love was to last for ever and truth was as clear as glass, he would have wept for joy; now it seemed ridiculous and tiresome.

"Have you no pity for me, Arthur? Am I nothing to you?" she still entreated, as he kept silence, staring at her in surprise. "I have no one in the world but you!" And she attempted to take his hand. All her pride was gone; the gulf between them must be carried at any hazard, even if it meant humiliation and disappointment.

"Let me pass, please," retorted Arthur at last, coolly. "Your behaviour is theatrical."

"No," she exclaimed passionately, catching his hands in spite of this stinging sarcasm. "You kill me with this neglect." And she bent so low that her head rested on his arm.

"Neglect? Nonsense, Claudia! Your foolishness is extravagant. Do you expect a man to spend his life in love-making? I thought we had quietly settled down to make the best of our mutual position."

"You are heartless," she cried, raising her head and pushing him from her. "If you hate me, tell me so and I will go. I will not bear this state of things; I cannot."

Was it by some strange fatality that at this instant the door opened and Gabriel entered? His face was unusually pale, and his sombre eyes flashed as he turned them upon Arthur. Mrs. Raughan swept away from them and went to her favourite seat. Raughan stared for a moment and then passed out.

In agonising silence Claudia sat, half stunned, waiting till the man should arrange the table near her chair, finish his menial duties, and then leave her alone to weep. Gabriel took the books off her table and came back with coffee, his face working painfully with what he was forced to suppress.

"Put it down," she whispered, as he stood before her with the tray in his trembling hands. The tray was at her side in a moment, and, as she raised her eyes to bid him go, she saw the freed hands give a passionate gesture, and heard the man groan as he left the room. "That man cannot be a servant, an inferior!" she thought. "What brings him here?"

An hour or two later, Arthur, who had not forgotten the recent unpleasant scene, came down to the drawing-room, and, finding the windows open, walked out upon the terrace. The mist was thick and the air cold for a spring night.

"Are you mad, Claudia?" he exclaimed, flicking the end of his cigar into the pond below the terrace. Mrs. Raughan was leaning on the low wall as if to watch the moonbeams that crept over the mist and fell brightly on to the water below.

"Why are you stopping out here on a damp night, making a tragedy about nothing?" he continued. "You are really too preposterously unreasonable. I shall soon lose my temper with you."

Mrs. Raughan moved, turned her dark eyes slowly upon him and seemed about to make an appeal. Arthur, who hated anything in the shape of a scene, retreated a step and lowered his eyes. This was more than his wife could bear.

"You talk to me of losing your temper," she cried, grasping his arm and speaking with intense scorn. "You, who haven't as much passion in your whole body as I have in my little finger!" Arthur attempted feebly to release his arm, utterly taken aback by the turn things were taking.

"You shall not go," she replied to his silent remonstrance. "You shall not go till you have answered me some questions."

Raughan had recovered himself now, and was determined to keep his temper, if possible, and to treat her folly with good-natured contempt.

"I suppose I must listen to a long tirade; so begin at once, please. Only, be as brief as you can, and don't rouse the whole house with your voice."

They paced up and down the terrace arm-in-arm, for she would not release her hold of him.

"Where were we five months ago?" she began breathlessly.

"In Italy, if my memory serves me. What a nuisance I haven't got another cigar!" and he felt in his pocket. Claudia went on:

"This night five months ago I had just come from the theatre; do you remember that?"

Raughan had found a cigar and was raising it to his lips when she dashed it out of his hand and repeated her question.

"My dear girl, do you suppose I make a note of everything that happens?" returned Raughan quietly. "Come; I mean to go in, and you shall come too."

"There is something I wish you to remember," continued Mrs. Raughan, taking no notice of his last words. "Five months ago I had come home from the theatre and had met you. I recall every word you said. You vowed that if I gave up the stage, which was my very world, that I should never repent it; that you would never give me cause for a moment's unhappiness! I remember how your tears fell on my hands. How are you keeping your promise, Arthur? Shall I go back and begin my old life again?"

"You are talking foolishly. I have given you no just cause for this outburst of passion. I think you are making up a grievance, and should scarcely expect me to be a sympathetic listener."

"Heaven knows," she exclaimed, "that I never dreamed you would be a sympathetic listener, but I thought at least that you would have a little feeling for me."

"You must not expect me to be perpetually talking of love, my dear Claudia," remarked her husband. "As to your going away, that's out of the question. We are married; you have nothing to complain of really, and so let us hear no more about the matter."

A look, half contemptuous, half despairing, flashed over Claudia's face as she dropped her husband's arm and followed him into the house; the sea might as well break upon the pebbles and hope to soften them, as she to move Arthur by her words.

Below the terrace stood Gabriel. His hands were clasped and pressed against the stones, his dark hair lay tangled and wet over his brow, and he was muttering under his breath.

Smith paused here and looked up from his papers. "There is a note in di Vilna's book which I should prefer to read to you as it is. It is dated April 20, midnight. 'I really forgot myself to-day, and she must have noticed it. The breach is getting wider and wider. My time is coming.'"

As I glanced now and again at Mrs. Raughan's face, it seemed to me to express a variety of emotions. I could almost cheat myself into believing that she followed every word of Smith's tale and was consciously testifying to its truth.

Smith again took up his MS. and continued :

The next day was as sultry as if it had been July. Guests would be coming in the afternoon, and Mrs. Raughan must assume a bright and affable appearance ; and though the recollection of last night lay like a weight upon her soul, she must keep far down in their source the tears that were only too ready to rise and proclaim to the unsympathetic world her secret sorrow. In spite of the sudden and oppressive heat, the afternoon went off very well. The beautiful hostess sang several times, and in her most charming manner. Many of those who had been most pressing were bored to death after the first song was half through, and were glad to escape and wander about the garden in spite of the black clouds that had been coming up out of the West and making a formidable background to the house. After much chatting and tea-drinking, Mrs. Brunswold, who had avoided the singing altogether, came up on the front lawn, where Claudia was sitting.

" You must sing that charming song you sang the other day," she shouted, flourishing her sunshade perilously near Raughan's eyes, as he followed behind her. Claudia protested that everybody had had enough singing in the drawing-room.

" Oh, not at all ; the guitar can come out here with the help of Mr. Raughan, and it will sound charming in the open air." Arthur was already running to obey this divinity, and Mrs. Raughan's expostulations were drowned in the hum of voices. The guitar arrived. Claudia looked, smiling, round, and began in sotto-voce as the song required.

Mrs. Brunswold, who was a little behind the rest, had found a convivial man at her elbow, and a little stage-whispered chaff went on between the two, occasionally varied by spasmodic flutterings from her sunshade to induce silence ; and this during the whole of the song which was so charming and which she was dying to hear again.

And so the agreeable afternoon wore on and the guests departed. A little later Claudia was sitting in her room looking over a letter she had written to the manager of the Opera House at Venice, when a knock came to the door, and her maid entered with a message from her master—that he was seeing Mrs. Brunswold home as her carriage had not come, and would Claudia excuse him if he were not back to dinner. Mrs. Raughan bent her head coldly as she sealed up the letter and gave it to the girl.

How interminably long that meal seemed with that silent, watchful man behind her chair. She felt his eyes upon her, and at moments almost doubted whether he could not read her very thoughts. The dead silence became at last so insupportable that she ventured a question. Had Mr. Raughan ordered the carriage ? No, he had not ordered the carriage. Was the storm likely to come on ? Yes, the

storm would doubtless come on shortly. "In that case," said Mrs. Raughan, "the closed carriage must be sent after him directly."

"Tell Maria to bring my hat, please," she added, rising from the table.

The man expostulated humbly but firmly—the storm would break almost immediately. The Signora, however, had determined to risk it. She meant to walk out, it was so oppressive in the house; and he saw her disappear in the direction of the ruined Abbey, a favourite spot. The clouds that had formed themselves into that formidable rampart behind the house were spreading overhead, and heavy drops came down through the sultry air. Then came a loud clap of thunder, followed immediately by a blinding flash of lightning. Mrs. Raughan must have just reached the ruins, and might be frightened at the strength of the storm. Gabriel caught up a cloak and ran as if for dear life down the front lawn and through the trees to the edge of the grounds, and then on through more trees to the Abbey glade. His black hair was flying as he ran, and in his face was a look of resolve taken in great agitation.

The rain had not yet pressed through the trees, but flash after flash lit up with startling brilliancy the growing twilight. The glade was reached, and within a stone's throw stood the ruins. There was Mrs. Raughan, motionless under the shelter of the broad gateway, her face pressed against the stones and tears falling down the pale cheeks. In a moment the valet was at her feet, breathless, groaning aloud and pressing her dress to his lips.

His mistress drew herself back as if to avoid some dangerous animal. "Release my dress," she commanded with haughty anger, as he clung to it in spite of her.

"Forgive me," murmured Gabriel, his head still bowed.

"Get up and go," she cried. "Are you mad, fellow?"

Instead of answering, his head drooped lower and lower until it almost touched her feet.

"Leave me this moment," she said, fumbling at the little dagger that hung in its jewelled sheath at her waist, "or I shall have to spurn you with my feet."

Gabriel leapt up. "I know," he cried, with fierce tenderness, "that you have the fearless courage of a noble soul, that you have the beauty of a goddess, that you have determination enough to retrieve the one unwise step you took; that even now you are planning for your future release!"

Mrs. Raughan started; an angry flush rose to her brow. "Insolent!" she muttered. "Let me pass, if you refuse to go yourself."

"Mrs. Raughan! Claudia! I have lived here a menial for five months! I have suffered martyrdom. I have been at the beck and call of *that* man, who is my inferior and whom I hate. I have degraded myself for ever in the sight of my equals, and, still worse, I have endured from you the scorn you would not have dared to show me had

you known who I am. I loved you in Florence, I moved heaven and earth to gain admission to you, but it was too late. I followed you to England, for your protection, knowing well what your future would be here. I believe myself, of all men, most capable of understanding you and holding you at your own noble worth. I wish only to be your servant. Forgive me," he went on, trembling, as his words seemed to fall on unheeding ears. "Forgive me if I have been premature in speaking to you. I might have endured longer."

She was surprised and bewildered. The sudden and unexpected revelation of this man's mystery, and the full realisation of her present position, deprived her for a moment of self command and reflection; even the look of contempt had faded from the face, leaving only traces of patient suffering. Di Vilna, indeed, wondered at her passive silence. "Claudia," he whispered, attempting to take her hand, "may I help you? Let me devote my life to you; let me lead you back to ambition and happiness."

This last word shook Mrs. Raughan out of her momentary forgetfulness. Withdrawing her hand coldly she looked him full in the face. "If your feelings are those of a true man you will leave me at once. At least give me the sad consolation of bearing my burden alone. I want—I need no help."

The Italian's face darkened. "You speak hastily; you think of me still as one beneath you; you cannot shake off the association of five months. Believe me!"

"Enough!" cried Claudia bitterly. "You may be of noble birth, but I feel it a degradation even to speak to you. Begone; and let me never look upon your face again."

"And shall I have no recompense for all I have endured? Will you not let me stay to watch over you? Have some pity on me, Claudia."

"You shall have some recompense! My husband will give you your wages, they are more than enough recompense for the services of a spy and an intruder."

Mrs. Raughan smiled pitilessly and turned to go, though the lightning was flashing in their eyes and the rain still poured in torrents. Gabriel caught both her hands convulsively and she was attempting to wrest them from his grasp, when they caught sight of Arthur's figure lounging up the grassy knoll.

It was too late. His face as he came upon them became white, and his hand clenched the riding-whip he had dangled so carelessly a moment before. In an instant he had stepped up to di Vilna and held him by the collar.

"Have you a word to say for this fellow?" he cried hoarsely.

"No," she answered scornfully.

The look Gabriel turned and cast on her was never forgotten by Raughan. Claudia heard behind her, as she hurried away, the sound of a short struggle, and then rapid strokes of a whip; and

she knew that the tall Italian was a mere puppet in the hands of the young English athlete.

The storm cleared off as suddenly as it had come on, and by midnight nothing was left of it in the calm air but the slow dripping of the trees. A bright light was still coming from the windows of the house, and to the solitary man outside it seemed as if this one glowing spot contained all that was worth loving or hating in this world.

Smarting from Raughan's whip, his hopes dashed to the ground and rejected by the one human being for whom life had seemed desirable, Gabriel prowled round the house from which he had been cast out for ever. He walked noiselessly over the terrace and crept round to the drawing-room windows. They were open, and he could see Claudia sitting at the further end writing. Arthur might be coming down in a few minutes. Her face was pale, but it wore a restful look that he had not seen there for a long time. Doubtless they were reconciled, and she would be happy for a short time again. Well—and the sense of his utter loneliness flashed upon him as he looked in.

Turning again he glanced back at the dark sky, the wet lawn; he heard the night wind sigh and rustle in the trees, which flung down heavy drops to the ground. Inside all was light, and there was the one human being worth living for or dying with. He stepped in.

Claudia looked up, startled, seeing who it was, in spite of his dragged clothes and disordered hair. She rose and walked towards the bell.

With whirling head Gabriel staggered forward and intercepted her. No word was spoken between them. Claudia did not scream when he snatched the dagger from her waist with his trembling hands; she only caught his wrist and turned her flashing eyes full upon him. For a few moments they stood staring, both reading in each other's eyes a fixed determination. Then suddenly Gabriel drew back his hand from her grasp.

Arthur Raughan was smoking upstairs, thinking idly over all that had happened. He felt happy and contented with his own behaviour, and with Claudia. He would go down directly and be very pleasant to her; after all, she was loving, and really did her best to make what she could of the situation. As he lounged into the drawing-room, his smile froze into a look of horror.

"The housekeeper remembers well that terrible night," Smith said, putting down his MS. "How Raughan nearly went mad, and how the servants ran about wringing their hands in the helpless way natural to them. The Limes was put into the hands of Mrs. Fitzgerald's father, and Arthur lived abroad till his death. The house

had for some years after this the reputation of being haunted. The servants insisted that on calm nights the figure of Mrs. Raughan might be seen pacing up and down the terrace, followed by the tall slinking form of the Italian valet, as they had always persisted in calling him. On windy nights they heard sounds of a guitar and singing from no earthly voice."

Smith had finished his tale, and we all thanked him. Conversation went on, but I could not talk, nor indeed think of anything but the tragedy I had just heard, and the portrait of Claudia Raughan seemed to haunt me like a physical pressure; I could not keep my eyes off it.

When I was alone in my room, I sat down before the fire to think over the whole story, but recollecting that if I still continued in the same train of thought I should not sleep the whole night, I strove to drive it from my remembrance. It was useless; my thoughts wandered back, and the portrait was still before my eyes.

At last my desire to see the face again grew so strong that I got up and crept downstairs in the dark. I found my way with some difficulty, knocking against several corners as I groped along. Once the drawing-room door was reached my heart almost misgave me, but it struck me that I could get a candle from one of the tables and at least light myself upstairs again. Opening the door softly I went in.

All was still, and the fire in the little room was sufficient to show me perfectly the objects in it. I made my way to the piano and stood looking at the portrait. In the flickering light it seemed to me as if her lips moved, and her eyes were fixed on mine with a searching melancholy. As I stood there a sudden thought flashed through my mind, and almost smiling at my folly, I opened the piano and sat down before it. Glancing once more at the face above me, I began to play, very softly, the opening notes of her favourite song, "*Une Nuit d'Été*." A shiver crept through me, and my hair crisped as I distinctly heard, close at my ear, a passionate and yet far-off voice responding to my invitation.

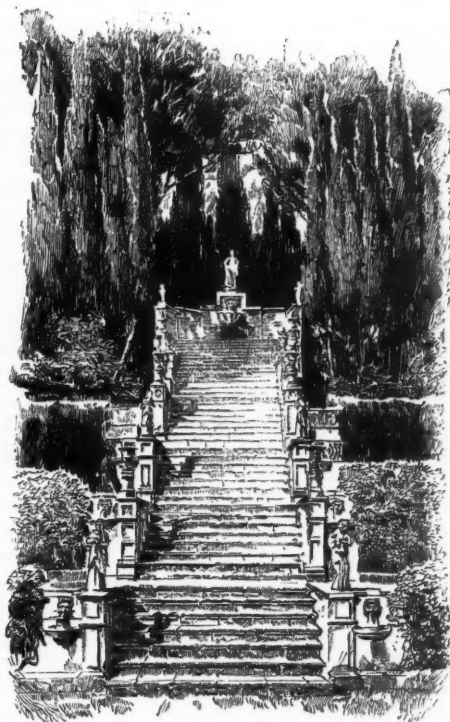
I do not know whether I went through the whole of the accompaniment, for I remembered nothing more till I found myself lying on the ground, the fire out, and the dawn peering through above the shutters.



LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"UNDER NORTHERN SKIES," ETC., ETC.

Soller, Nov., 1886.



MY DEAR E.—
We were to ascend the Puig Major. A. carries everything before him like an autocrat. He has only to suggest things and they are done. Indeed, Rosita divines his wishes before they are spoken. I cannot in the least make all this out. I have to speak very distinctly before my wishes are understood and regarded.

This going up the Puig Major was a great undertaking for me. Although by far the lightest weight of the party, Nature never intended me for a mountain climber. The Puig Major is hardly a mountain, you might reply ; but the way to

the summit is most certainly a "*peine forte et dure*." However, let us begin at the beginning.

H. C. was in great form. The idea of ascending the Puig Major was especially agreeable to him. He is endowed with all those muscular powers which add so much to the pleasures of life. Like Longfellow on another occasion, he thought he should remain all night on the summit, to become thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the solitude and silence of the situation, and make it the subject of his next grand epic poem.

A. undertook to organise the excursion. There was not very much to be done, but that little was important. We should require a mule and a boy, paniers well laden with luncheon, wine to make up for the wear and tear to the constitution caused by so much undue exertion. We were in good hands. A. is one who will never allow the citadel to starve so long as there is corn in Egypt.

The next morning we were up early. I cannot quite say that we rose with the sun, for we did not see the sun. He was not visible throughout the day, and I am not sure that he rose at all. A hasty glance at the Puig Major showed it capped and clouded. It was a grey morning; almost the first in our experience of Mallorca; but in England we should have called it very fair weather.

A. therefore laughed to scorn any suggestion of deferring the expedition. In our case it would have meant giving it up altogether, for we had put off our departure by only one day. It was the utmost we could do without interfering very much with our future plans. So the hampers were packed with a goodly store, and the mule at the door looked at them with a patient protest.

In truth he was not lightly laden. The paniers themselves are formidable. In addition to the commissariat supplies, our camera and tripod and all the etceteras were stowed away in their capacious dimensions. For we intended to take photographs from the summit, not only of the world below but of that above. We should be so much nearer the sun, it was just possible that if he condescended to shine upon us we might make solar discoveries and revolutionise our present system. Then great coats and ulsters were added to the burden of the mule, which felt that it was very nearly approaching the last straw.

Over all was thrown the thick rug, white and woolly, which is ordinarily used in Mallorca on such occasions. On this and between the paniers anyone might mount during the transit from earth to the top of the Puig Major. The mule probably would object to the extra burden, but like most oppressed races, it would have to submit.

There was a great deal of small excitement, both inside and outside the fonda. A party of five Englishmen starting from Soller to make the ascent of the mountain (I like to put it as importantly as possible) was unprecedented. The fifth Englishman consisted of A's servant, James, the most useful member of the small community. Rosita was in her element: so active that she seemed ubiquitous; so anxious for one's welfare, that she appeared a veritable ministering spirit. Whether her affections were directed towards A. or lavished upon H. C. I could not be quite certain, but I had my opinion. I was quite sure that as soon as we were gone, she would rush off to church and pray to her favourite saint for our safe return. She would have done better to pray for a fine day.

Even Mariquita came a little out of her shell, and stood with her knitting in the doorway, looking on at the lading of the mule, smiling

out of her pretty shy eyes with an effect which I thought would endanger Rosita's reign—as far as H. C. was concerned.

At length everything was ready and we started. Of course there was a crowd outside to see us depart. The arrival of the diligence was a small matter compared with this. The mule boy followed up behind us, leading his long-suffering animal. He was a boy with ideas, and very often wanted to go one way whilst we went another. We knew better, however, than to trust him out of our sight; we should never have seen mule or boy or provisions again. Imagine our exhausted state at the top of the Puig Major with nothing wherewith to restore animation! We should never have lived to come down again. H. C.'s night of silence and solitude would have known no to-morrow.

Mariquita and Rosita watched us from their doorway all down the narrow street, anxiety in their faces, a love-light in their eyes. This, H. C. said, was meant for the mule: it was compassion, not love; they are all fond of animals, these Mallorquinas, and are very good to the dumb creatures. I don't think they ever even drown their kittens, for the place is overrun with cats. You never saw such miserable specimens. They are half the size of our English cats, and if there were convicts in the cat world, I should say these Mallorca cats from first to last were all at large on a ticket of leave. Small as they are, they have immense voices, and the caterwauling that goes on at night has constantly disturbed my rest and very much affected my nervous system. H. C. has many a time got up and thrown a boot at them, but the missile seems to escape them or go through them, just as if they were ghosts or had a charmed life: and all they do in return is to sit up on their hind legs and make faces at him—or so it looks to one's sleepy and distorted imagination. He even went to the chemist's one day and bought the largest squirt in the shop, but he might have spared himself the trouble: a fire-engine would not move them.

Our progress down the narrow streets of Soller was attended with much excitement. People flocked to their doors and gazed after us as if we had been a group of angels from Paradise. The mule attracted great attention, and the mule boy, thinking it a pity the seat should be wasted, had himself mounted the animal.

Outside the town we came upon one of the old crosses for which Mallorca may be said to be famous. It was a sort of religious day in Soller, and surrounding the cross, occupied in short devotions, knelt a group of people. It was very impressive; nothing could be more picturesque. Everything was in harmony with the scene: the rich and beautiful plain, the far off hills, of which the Puig Major was most conspicuous, the small villages that dotted the slopes like nests on the hill sides. Grey and ancient, solitary and deserted they seemed, with their small churches, and an occasional monastery uprearing its gloomy walls, once the scene of cloistered monks, now

silent and abandoned or turned to secular and profane uses. The very greyness of the skies threw a certain solemn tone over all that seemed to fit in with the devotions of these kneeling figures, who cling to their crosses and their superstitions with a persistence and a fervour that, however mistaken, prove the steadfastness of their faith in the unseen.

We went our way, longing for sunshine, the one thing wanting in our day's happiness. The Puig Major was still cloud-capped, and the cloud never lifted. It would lift at twelve, A. said, for he looks at the bright side of things, or appears to do so. In consequence of this prophecy we went on in hope; a hope unfulfilled. But this is only one's experience of life; and that we still go on forever hoping, ever sanguine, ever thinking the world beautiful, and that there is an earthly paradise in store for us as well as a heavenly, only proves the truth of the saying that Hope springs eternal in the human breast.

We journeyed through the loveliest country. There were palm trees, with their rich bronze clusters of dates hanging in four quarters like the four points of the compass. There were orange groves in perpetuity; endless groves both of oranges and lemons; the latter still green and unripe. The orange trees were loaded with fruit, and their splendid foliage spread over the land like a brilliant mantle. Dry walls, old and crumbling, bounded our road. Beside us was the wide, tortuous bed of a torrent. It had run almost dry. The rainy season sets in only when the new year has well entered upon its reign. What water there was added much to the beauty of the landscape. In the gardens surrounding the farm houses there grew immense rose bushes, each tree containing hundreds of blossoms small but sweet scented, and all at our disposal.

And ever before us was our goal, the Puig Major, looking like a pilgrimage that ought to atone for a life's sins.

Up to a certain distance the level road made our work easy. Then began the ascent. We passed through a small mountain village, and soon after left all civilisation behind us. Our path narrowed and wound amongst the hills. On far-off slopes people were at work, and a girl's bright voice went ringing through the air. It was the most musical voice I have heard in Mallorca, and for the first time there seemed something like melody in what she sang.

The hills closed in upon us. There was just room for the mountain torrent to make its dashing way into the plains below. Here and there on a fig tree we found a last fig of the season, but I cannot say that we ever left it behind us. We accepted it as a prize. The road itself was very frightful, a self-inflicted treadmill; a series of loose stones and steps than which nothing on earth is more tiring.

No one in penal servitude ever worked so hard as we did that day. Yet with the inconsistency of human nature we thoroughly enjoyed it. Of course if one broke stones on the road for pleasure, although

it is convict work, one would imagine it to be the height of enjoyment.

But this especial road up to the Puig Major must be the very worst in the world. It cannot have a rival. Loose stones frequently brought some of us down upon our knees. The very mule occasionally staggered and stumbled. Sometimes it would become



MARIQUITA AND ROSITA.

almost perpendicular in the steeper places, and how the paniers kept on remains a miracle to this day.

Our party became detached and straggling, and I was soon far behind the others. A. and B. were ahead. H. C. went in for what he called his regulation step of twenty-seven inches, a sort of seven-leagued stride without the seven-leagued boots. I came last of all, in company with the mule, and once (I tell you this in confidence), I gave in and mounted it for half an hour.

That one half hour saved me. I was a long way behind, and no one saw my humiliation. It was a horrible motion. I mounted the rug between the paniers, and you cannot imagine a more uncomfortable seat. My legs disappeared, but I never knew where or how. The mule ambled with a kind of wobbling motion that quickly produced a feeling of seasickness. I can describe it in no other way. Every now and then it stumbled, and I only saved myself from pitching over its head by hanging on to the mane. The paniers swayed from side to side, exactly as a vessel rolls at sea. Once they turned round and I found myself on the ground, feeling as if the world had turned upside down. But it was I who had done so, not the world. The boy stopped the mule and put everything right again, but I had had enough of the animal. Henceforth, come what might, I would trust to my own powers.

I rather began to repent my folly in ascending the Puig Major. A. and B. were always far ahead. To them the ascent was child's play, as it was to H. C., who went swinging on with his everlasting regulation-step, until I almost wished the earth would open and swallow him up. It was very provoking; but I had the best of it, inasmuch as I kept up with the mule, which bore the supplies. I know they were all a little uncomfortable, fearing that I should find it necessary to draw largely upon the wine.

Yet, with all its drawbacks, it was a strangely pleasant expedition. Occasionally our pathway opened out upon a broad mountain side, and we found ourselves in a small wood with a gentle stream running through it. Here we would all meet and rest, and look out upon the world below; valleys and passes and opposite hills. We sat on great stones that lay about the pools and the running water; and the mule waited patiently; and the boy every now and then took a sly peep into the paniers, evidently wondering how much of the good things would fall to his share.

Continual dropping will wear away a stone; step by step, the ladder of life is climbed; the heights are reached, and the downhill journey commences. It is then that the years begin to pass as a tale that is told. So, by patience and perseverance, we may climb the highest peak in the world.

But, there are conditions to this: many of these lie in the elements, as they did to-day. We went onwards and upwards with a courage that was meritorious. We continued to hope against hope with the persistence of sanguine temperaments. A.'s everlasting "Wait until twelve o'clock," had its effect upon our imaginations, if not our reason. The Puig Major was still cloud-capped. Once, indeed, it all rolled away for a few moments, leaving the peak clear and sharply outlined. "I told you so!" cried A., and H. C. gave a feeble cheer which died half uttered, for before the hills could carry on the fainting echoes, down swept a mass of vapour more dense than ever, and the Puig Major became once for all invisible.

For twelve o'clock struck and brought no change, except a change for the worse. The higher we ascended, the further we plunged into the mire. The atmosphere grew cold and creepy. We passed into the clouds, which enveloped us like a Scotch mist. *Les beaux esprits se rencontrent*, and we found that a Mallorcan mist and a Scotch mist differed in name only. Everyone felt very agueish; and as at the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel, each man called out for his sack in which to put his tools (for which reason the word sack is the same in all languages), so now every man called for his flask. "A good pull and a strong pull, and a pull altogether." This was their motto. *I* had provided myself with a delicious and health-restoring bottle of beef-tea, "made on the premises," as some of our English wine merchants do *not* say, but ought to say, and found this much more sustaining.

I saw A.'s face lengthen as we went deeper into the mist, and our temperature lowered, and our teeth began to chatter. It certainly was growing extremely uncomfortable. In continuing the ascent I felt that we were pursuing a phantom, working for an idea.

"If we persevere and reach the top, what shall we see?" I ventured to ask at last, very mildly.

Dead silence for a moment. Then: "Nothing," said A.

"So that we are taking all this trouble and exhausting this patient mule, simply to see Nothing?"

"I fear you have uttered only the words of wisdom," said A. with sphinxlike gravity.

"But we can shut our eyes and see nothing," cried H. C.

"Yes; and we can say we've been to the top without absolutely going there," returned A. "It comes to the same thing on a day like this. Let us all fancy ourselves at the top."

"I think it is no fancy that we are uncomfortable," continued H. C., whose regulation step had long since yielded to Scotch mist, and whose devotion to the flask quite equalled his attentions to the keg that day in the boat, when we paid our visit to the Dragon caves of Manacor.

No one answered; everyone shivered; great chattering of teeth; songs without words. Silence gave consent to that last remark.

And then by common agreement we halted. It was proposed, and carried unanimously, that we should bivouac where we were. The place was favourable to encamping, if any place could be called so in these exalted regions. There was a dry wall running along, built for some mysterious purpose, and we took shelter beneath it. But oh, how cold it was! I have never been so cold in my life; not even at the top of the North Cape, where, in the middle of July, we encountered hail and sleet and a rude easterly hurricane, and never so much as a tree for shelter. As for the midnight sun, we never saw a ray of it. It had fled from all this horrible climate, and taken refuge at the back of the more kindly North Pole.

To-day, on the Puig Major, it was even worse. The mist enwrapped us like rain, and chilled us to the bone. We all felt that we had a violent attack of rheumatic fever, without the fever—of which we should have been rather glad. The wind whistled and blew through the crevices of the dry wall, and caught the backs of our necks with a paralysing effect. Dislocation could hardly have been worse. That is a quick death; this was a slow one.

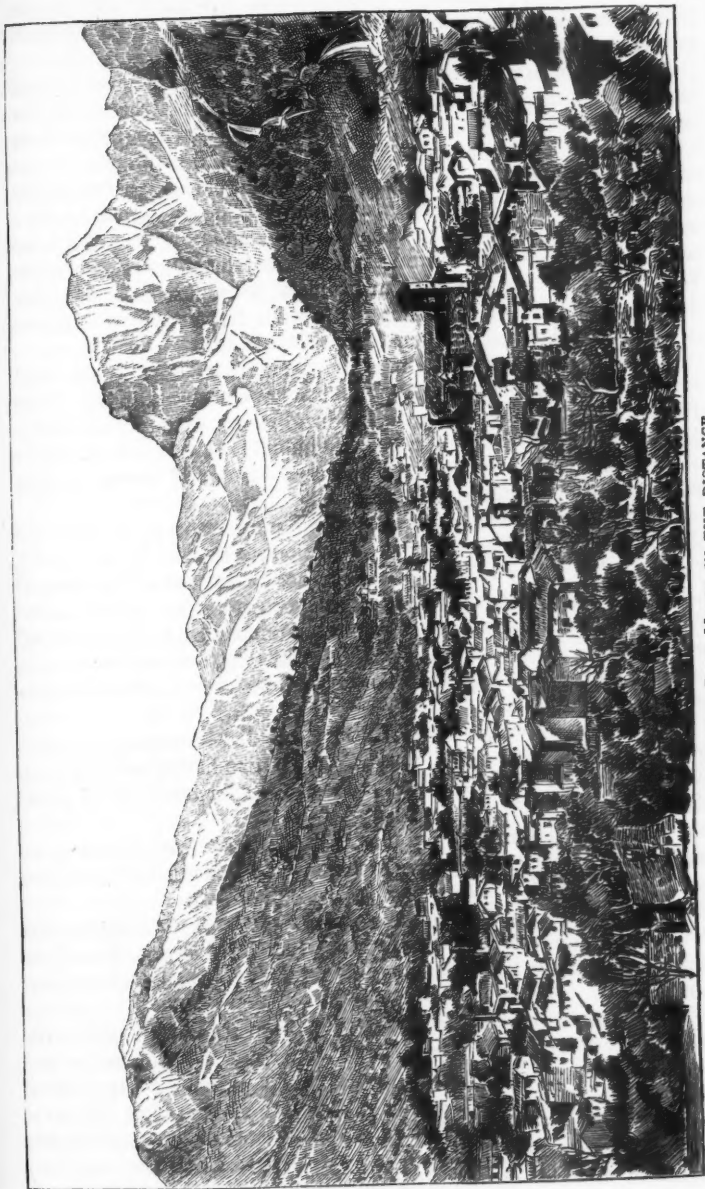
We could see nothing, but we felt a very great deal. As I was considered the least robust of the party, I received the most attention. If I was not looked upon as the ugly duckling, at least I needed more "looking up" than anyone else. So you see that a reputation for delicacy, whether deserved or not, has its occasional advantages. You are helped to the wing of the chicken, for instance, whilst someone else takes the drumstick.

B., with a self-sacrificing spirit that was simply beautiful, insisted upon lending me his ulster. Whilst we were reposing, it was gratefully received, but, when we began to go down hill again, I felt like a man in a dressing-gown; and not by any means his own dressing-gown. B., I think, is six feet four in his shoes, and consequently I had to hold up the ulster with both hands. I daresay it looked very graceful, but it felt extremely awkward. Moreover, my hands were not at liberty, so that I frequently slipped and came down with a humiliating determination. In other words, as *Mdlle. Bouglinval*, your French governess, used to say when, as children, we often came to grief: "*Il a pris un billet de parterre sans payer.*" I fear we sometimes paid for it only too heavily in those days.

To-day we encamped behind a wall. The wind whistled through the crevices and nearly cut off our heads. I caught a stiff neck, from which I am still suffering. On our return, Rosita offered to iron it (a Mallorquin remedy for stiff necks), but lightning flashed from A.'s bright eyes, and thunder issued from H. C.'s Cupid's bow of a mouth, and Rosita fled one way and I escaped by another. I am certain that these two men, each, I have said, with such amiable capacities, will before long come to the same violent and tragic end as the Kilkenny cats that we read of in history.

Under the shadow of the dry wall, the paniers were dismounted, and the patient mule heaved quite a long-drawn sigh of relief. James spread our cloth and tried to unpack. But he was quite as frozen as anyone else, and the hard-boiled eggs slipped through his hands, and A. turned pale when he took up the wine bottles, and H. C. laid violent hands upon the chickens. Going down hill later on, James asked me, with quiet resignation, if I had had a pleasant day; and I confided to him my convictions that not one nail but many nails had been driven into my coffin by this mist-laden, path-broken expedition.

Fortunately our appetites were not paralysed. H. C.'s regulation step had developed special capacities. He ate four eggs to every one



SOLIER, PUIG MAJOR IN THE DISTANCE.

else's two, and appropriated a whole chicken to himself. Then, like Oliver, he asked for more, but I am glad to tell you that he didn't get it; for which denial he revenged himself upon the wine.

An old man came up leading a horse, and seemed much interested in our appearance and condition. Probably he thought we all felt very happy and comfortable. We should, indeed, have been in an earthly paradise if only we had had blue skies and sunshine. James offered the old man some refreshment: half a chicken, a few boiled eggs, and a cup of sparkling wine. Sparkling is employed as a metaphor, you understand. His eyes sparkled—this time the word is not a metaphor—but he would not embrace the golden opportunity. We wondered. He was evidently hungry, yet refused the tempting delicacies. It was certainly not shyness, for he made no scruple of looking on and assisting at our festive gathering.

The mule boy solved the mystery. James was offering the food with his left hand, and the Mallorquins have a superstition. They will take nothing given with the left hand, these remote peasants of the country. It would bring them ill-luck. Upon which James transferred the peace offering to the right hand, and it was at once gratefully accepted and disposed of.

I think the old man must have been unaccustomed to wine, for after this he became eccentric in his actions. Instead of continuing his way uphill to the unknown land whither he was bound, he finished his conversation with the mule boy, and then began to retrace his steps. I am persuaded he was under the impression that he was still ascending. However, it was his affair, not ours, and we left him to his own devices. One thing is certain: we sent him on his way rejoicing and comforted.

All this time we were wrapped in cloud, blinded by vapour, saturated by mist. Rheumatic pains shot about us like flashes of lightning. We felt like Rip Van Winkle when he awoke after his hundred years' sleep.

"Where is the summit of the Puig Major?" I asked, as we all made a move, and our joints began to grate like rusted locks, and creak like five-barred gates.

"Up there," replied A., pointing into the clouds. "Imagine that you see the dim outline of a peak. That's it. I am quite ready to accompany you, if you like to venture. It would take us another hour."

We all shuddered at such a death-blow proposition. James hastily restored the paniers to their place. The mule felt its burden had been considerably lightened. We left the fragments for any birds of prey that might haunt this mist-wreathed mountain, and began to descend. I stepped out boldly, gracefully holding up B.'s friendly ulster. Imagine me if you can. I feel that I am also exposing myself to your ridicule, but as a faithful chronicler I must be exact in my small facts.

"The downhill path is easy." I beg to draw the line at the downhill path of the Puig Major, which proves the exception. It is extremely difficult, shakes one to pieces, seems absolutely endless. Occasionally it becomes so steep that you have to run for it; and, as nature has not provided the human body with brakes, it is often extremely difficult to pull up. Sometimes you come against a solid body with a shock that knocks the breath out of you, and internally reduces you to a jelly.

Every now and then, in one of these steep declines, I caught my foot in the ulster, doubled up and rolled over like a hedgehog. It seemed very amusing to those who looked on. People have no sympathy on these occasions; no compassion. They laugh at you. I suppose it is human nature. Who ever does anything but laugh at anyone whose hat blows off, or whose umbrella turns inside out?

We came to a halt every now and then; rested upon the huge stones under the trees of the small mountain forests; listened to the rippling of the water; took breath and compared notes of wounds and bruises. I headed the list: was, so to say, in the sixth form, whilst the others had none of them even obtained their "remove."

We photographed each other in groups. The mule appeared splendidly. It always moved its head, and came out with two heads. The effect was extremely original. We think of sending it to the Royal Society of Anatomy, as a singular freak of nature: a two-headed Mallorcan mule! It would create a sensation. Learned professors would lecture upon the phenomenon, look wise, and give some very sage explanations of the matter.

In the last group, A. and I are skilfully posed. It is quite a tableau. I am standing in a pool of water, but just escape wetting my feet by using a couple of stones placed very far apart. My footing is consequently precarious, and I have to throw myself into an attitude. A. is offering me his flask, as if I were in the last state of exhaustion. This appearance is not assumed. I feel as if there were nothing left of me but my boots. Unfortunately A. places his stick under his arm, and it is so directed that it looks as if I were running him through the body. Altogether, we might be having a very comfortable little duel in the Bois de Boulogne, after the manner and custom of the excitable Parisians. But, perhaps, B.'s description is as good as any, who remarks that I come out like Ajax defying the lightning.

Luckily for Ajax, I have long since discarded the ulster. The last roll over was just one too many. H. C. grows vulgar upon the occasion—he who is generally so poetically refined—and says that I look like a battered Aunt Sally on a Derby racecourse, without the redeeming pipe; black eyes and swollen features and developments unknown to phrenology. I am too exhausted to retaliate, and ask him how he looked when we came off the rocks of Miramar, ragged and tanned, that past and gone Sunday. I shall never forget how

the Archduke stared at him, and how he really couldn't move away from the wall where he pretended to be sketching as if his daily bread depended upon it.

As we got lower down the hill the atmosphere improved, the temperature rose. We left clouds and mist behind us; our blood began to circulate. But the difficulties of our path seemed to increase.



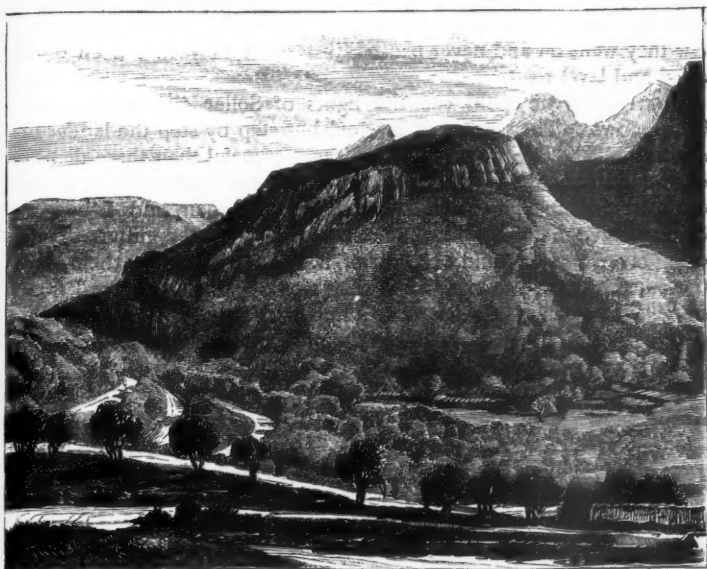
IN THE VALE OF SOLLER.

The shades of evening were gathering. If night fell before we reached the plains, it would be almost impossible to get on.

At this stage A. and B. basely deserted us. They were a little way ahead and out of sight, and when we came to a place where two roads met, we could not tell which one to take. I have no organ of locality: H. C. lives up in the clouds; the mule-boy stood with his mouth wide open, utterly lost. James, who had kept with us, wouldn't hazard an opinion.

"They both lead downward, sir," he said, and perhaps both meet at the end."

It was a sensible remark, pleasantly vague. We made a shot for it, and turned to the right. I was on the very verge of expiring from fatigue, and we had no remedy at hand. We had the mule and the paniers, but A. and B. had carried off all the flasks. As soon as we get back to England, I intend to have them prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. There are crimes that cannot be passed over.



ANCIENT OLIVE-TREES.

Our right road very soon proved a wrong one. It led us in a very short time into the narrow, broken pathway of a dried-up torrent. Anything more terrible in the way of walking you cannot imagine. It wound and twisted about like a snake in agony. Its ups and downs were far worse than the uncertainties of life. It was a series of crumbling stones and small rocks. Of secure foothold, there was none. Often it was so steep that we simply had to slide down to the next landing stage. We were rolling and tumbling about the whole time. The very conies themselves would often have been tempted to turn backwards.

It was evident that we had lost our way, and turned out of the right track. Our only hope was that, as we were certainly descending all the time, and as all roads lead to Rome, so in the end we should find ourselves in Soller.

No doubt it was a very magnificent scene. The valley into which we were descending was rich and fertile. Beautiful trees often over-shadowed us. The only barren spot visible was this wild, rocky, and tortuous torrent pathway. On either side rose the splendid heights—large, expansive, interminable. Behind us—capricious fate!—the Puig Major had become clear and visible. Mists and clouds had departed with the going down of the sun. It was cruel.

For the sun had now set, and darkness was falling. We were falling also. It was no longer very possible to see one's way, and we frequently came to grief. The mule and the boy alone seemed to have the power of seeing, like cats, in the dark. It was wonderful how they went on and never paused, just as if they had been on a broad and level road.

Down below we could see the lights of Soller glimmering from the windows. They were still afar off, but step by step the ladder of life is climbed. No vision was ever more grateful than these distant lights. Before entering the torrent path, I have told you that I was on the verge of expiring: this completed the affair, and I begged them to leave me to die, like Jane Shore, quietly in the gutter. They were perverse, and would not hear of it. I tried to bribe them, but that failed. I used threats, with a like result. Lights gleamed from the villages on the hill sides, and I implored them to take my bones to one of the cottages, and leave them there: for I was nothing but bones now: all flesh had long since disappeared. No; I might as well have talked to the mule; I could get nothing out of them, except an unsteady but determined downward course. At length I sank upon a stone. H. C. pulled up.

"Looks very like the end, certainly," he cried, with quite a cheerful ring in his voice. "How would you like to be buried—in the ordinary way, or cremated?"

"I believe, sir," said James, "if you would take my arm, a little more would do it. I see the end of this pathway not ten yards ahead. I did think it was leading us to the bottomless pit, but the mule and the boy are waiting for us on the high road. We shall find it easy enough there."

So it proved. Once on the road the relief was so great that it brought with it the necessary stimulus for further exertion.

After all, it does not do to give in. It is cowardly, and shows nervous deficiency. With the necessity comes the power. We must all "dree our weird," but there are two ways of doing it. Depend upon it, if ever we come face to face in life with an insupportable burden, it has been absolutely and entirely of our own making. We lay weights upon our own shoulders grievous to be borne, but it is a consolation to think that perhaps even these are a part of our life's mysterious plan, in some way or other contributing to our highest development. We cannot tell why it should be so, any more than we can see the end of our lives from the beginning: any more than we

can solve the whole mystery of existence, explain the origin of evil, the plan of creation, or fathom the mystery of the great Atonement.

We have to leave all these questions, and it is wiser not to enter into unprofitable speculations, which would either destroy our reason or shake our faith. We must be content to possess our souls in patience. Nothing is more mysterious and incomprehensible than a great deal of the Seen, and we must be content to leave the Unseen to a day when for each one of us the mists must clear away and the veil be lifted, and we no longer see through a glass darkly.

It was plain sailing on the broad road. One by one in the dark we recognised the old landmarks we had passed in the morning. The orange and lemon groves were about us, but invisible. The fruit perfumed the air, and in this manner still threw out its unseen influence. Here again was the old cross, but the kneeling figures had disappeared. It was solitary and deserted, yet still pointing upwards. The stars were shining with intense brilliancy. I have told you how large and splendid they are in these latitudes, and, indeed, you have seen this for yourself. In England we have no conception of the beauty of a southern sky; southern or northern either; for I have seen them equally large and brilliant in the colder canopy of Norway.

To-night we traced all the well-known positions. The pointers were at their faithful task, indicating the North Star. The Signs of the zodiac followed in their course. Lower down, Orion, most beautiful of all the constellations, was followed by Sirius, which flashed and flamed and literally blazed with glory. Though in a most expiring mood, it was impossible not to be enthusiastic and absorbed in the majesty of the scene: these stars which, night by night, "take up their wondrous tale."

We went on our way, H. C. as fresh as ever, still keeping to his "regulation step" of twenty-seven inches, in a most irritating manner. The stream beside us looked dark and silent. The whole influence was weird and romantic. The air was warm and balmy, just as, on the Puig Major, it had been the opposite. This, at any rate, in H. C.'s words, was "grateful and comforting."

As we passed the first house in Soller, two shadows fell across our path, quickly followed by their substance: A. and B., full of apologies.

"How did we come to miss each other?" said A. "I had no idea we were so far ahead. When we found you were not in our track we shouted ourselves hoarse, but only the hills replied.—You look rather done up," turning to me compassionately.

"No wonder: you carried off all the flasks," was the only reply I condescended. "Would you mind handing me one of them?"

"With pleasure," replied A., "but—ahem—ahem—ahem—they are all empty. B. felt a sudden pain in the head. It was excruciating. I thought once it was all over with him. The fact is he is not used to mountain climbing and it has been too much for his heart.—Won't you take my arm?"

So arm in arm, forgiving and forgetting—it is impossible to be otherwise with A.—we went through the darkened streets of Soller. Lights gleamed from the houses, and in many a court we saw the quaint, old-fashioned, classical-looking lamp casting its glare upon human faces, throwing shadows upon the walls. The patient mule came on behind us, bearing its burden. We turned the corner—the very last turning in our pilgrimage—and in a few moments the hospitable doors of the *Fonda del Pastor* were thrown open to us. Everything was at once excitement at our appearance, commiseration at not having reached the summit of our ambition, congratulation at our safe return.

I sank into the nearest chair, and presently was carried upstairs, just like a wooden image in a procession—and I felt just as much in jeopardy. Of course this was all done in fun—I was quite capable of walking up. Rosita administered restoratives, having first of all obtained A.'s tacit permission to pay me so much attention. H. C., however, evidently resented it bitterly. A. and B. went in for pomegranates and anisette—such a mixture, you know. H. C. wrote a sonnet, under the inspiration of a cup of coffee. Presently we were all ourselves again, and met round the festive board. The old lady had prepared us everything of which Soller was capable. It was not exactly a Lord Mayor's feast, but here we are thankful for small mercies; and to-night, by comparison, the mercies were really abundant.

So ended our ascent of the Puig Major.

I never intend to ascend another, for I should never survive it. And nine times out of ten, in ascending mountains, you are disappointed. Either storms come on, or the summits are cloud-capped, or the sun never rises. Whatever it may be, something generally happens to mar the expedition. And sometimes, we know, the worst happens. This could not be in climbing the hills of Soller, and we all returned safe and sound from our pilgrimage. Yet, as you have seen, it was in one sense a failure—for we never reached the top of the Puig at all.

And now, to-night, in spite of so much hard and exhausting work, you see I have managed to take up my tale again, and write you a long letter.

H. C. is sketching on the other side of the table. He had a supply of soda water brought up into our sitting-room, and has gone in for it rather extensively. It is diluted with stronger waters, however; and I hear him murmuring and crooning to himself snatches of impromptu verse, of which the burden sounds very much like "*Mariquitarosita*," very crookedly pronounced. I daresay A. is dreaming very much the same sort of thing. Both are evidently living in a fool's paradise. Let them do so. "*Les beaux jours de la vie*" come only once in our lives.

It is far on in the night. Our windows are open to the balmy air.

Cockcrowling and caterwauling mingle their sweet sounds. The old watchman has passed by many a time since I took up my pen. All the town is in silence, and all the stars are travelling homewards. To-morrow—or rather to-day—we leave this beautiful old place, perhaps for ever. I shall do so with infinite regret. The lordly barouche is to be here at twelve o'clock to bear us away—like the Swan in *Lohengrin*, but the car is not quite so gilded, nor are the steeds so poetical. But I have a presentiment that something will happen : either it will break down on the road ; or it will never come at all ; or we shall be laid up with stiff joints and rheumatic fever, the result of Mallorcan mists on the Puig Major.

But whatever it may be, this must form the burden of my next letter—if I survive to write you another. For the present the pen falls from the hand, the eyelids refuse to remain open. H. C. declares that he cannot tell perpendicular from horizontal. I can quite believe it. Six empty soda water bottles, not one of which has fallen to my share, tell their own tale.

Yet, mystery of mysteries ! I go over to examine his work, and it is perfect. A humorous sketch of us all, sitting under the dry wall on the Puig Major. We look intensely miserable and shivering. H. C. has his foot vindictively planted on A.'s prostrate form. I am in the agonies of a stiff neck. Afar off, most poetically put in, rising out of the mist like Aphrodite from the foam of the sea, appears a most perfect likeness of Rosita, who, like a ministering angel, is holding up a flat iron,



SWEET SUMMER HOURS.

SWEET summer hours ! with fragrance
filled,

The sunshine falls upon the lea ;
The world is gay with music trilled
From every wayside bush and tree,
Could more melodious notes be heard
Than yonder lark's triumphant
strain ?

Yet, listening, my heart is stirred
To something less of joy than pain.

Sweet summer hours ! Ah, wherefore
must

Your fleeting charm our fall betray,
So swift to feed the cruel lust
Of earth's grim enemy, decay ?
In vain with blind persistence strange

We think to hold time's treasures
fast,

For even in our grasp they change
To tender memories of the past.

Sweet summer hours ! Too briefly
bright

The glamour lies o'er land and sea ;
Too quickly merged in winter's night
Your presence here must ever be.

But give again your gracious store,
And win our thoughts to that blest
clime,

Where death shall grieve us never
more,

And beauty live untouched by time.

SYDNEY GREY.

SEVENTEEN.

I.

THAT old walled-in garden was a pleasant place in summer afternoons. The grass grew high beneath the apple-trees; the trees spread out their wide arms and made great patches of welcome shade; clove-pinks and tall white lilies and sweet-smelling mint and thyme grew close together amongst the currant-bushes near the wall, and all the air was sweet with perfume.

I loved that garden. It was the one spot where I could breathe freely and be happy. Aunt Maria never came there. Uncle Richard, if he strolled up and down sometimes, with his pipe and *Times*, did not frighten me. He smiled at me in a kindly way. Once he patted my head and asked if the girls were good to me; and on one memorable day he had taken my chin between his hands and looked long at me, with dim eyes with a look of sorrowful remembrance in them, and then said, "You are like your mother, Nell. God bless you, child."

Sometimes Rose and Letty, my cousins, would bring their book or needlework and sit beneath the trees reading or chatting, but that was not often. Aunt Maria kept Letty practising scales in the morning and Italian songs in the afternoon; and poor Rose got into trouble for every fresh freckle or gnat's bite, and seldom dared venture out. And sometimes, at rarer intervals, Will Donaldson would stroll up and down the weedy paths beneath the wall, and view the peaches and talk politics with Uncle Richard; and then, letting Uncle Richard pass on, would come and talk to me instead. But Will's presence never spoiled the garden for me.

Will was not my cousin. He was Aunt Maria's nephew. I was only Uncle Richard's niece. He was a well-connected, prosperous, altogether satisfactory relation, as all Aunt Maria's relations were. I was the poorest of all Uncle Richard's nieces, and that is saying much.

Will often stayed with us. Aunt Maria intended that he and Rose should marry by-and-bye; and when Will was not present, she talked of this plan quite openly.

"I do not see that you could do better, Rose," she would say with a judicial air. "Now I, if I had not thrown myself away upon your papa when I was too young to know any better, might have married whom I pleased. But *you*—you have no 'go' about you, Rose—and men *do* object so much to a skin that freckles. I was a very pretty girl—the prettiest complexion in the world; but at seventeen I married your papa, as you know, and there was an end of every thing. But in your case it is different; you may be satisfied with Will, I think. The property is entailed, you know, and it *must* come to Will, though that other boy *is* the favourite son."

Rose would protest as much as she dared. But Aunt Maria over-ruled her objections peremptorily. "‘Not want to marry!’ Nonsense! Every girl wants to marry. ‘Not want to marry *Will*?’ I should be glad to know whom you mean to marry then! ‘Will does not wish to marry you?’ Stuff and nonsense! What does he come here for?"

No one could answer that last question satisfactorily. Perhaps he came for the fishing and shooting; perhaps he found it dull at home. But he did not come for the sake of Rose, and Rose knew that. Once I heard them talking together about Aunt Maria's scheme, and they were laughing gently, without a touch of self-consciousness or embarrassment. And once I heard him deliver a message from his brother, "that other boy," the favourite, but not the elder son. It was a very unimportant message. Aunt Maria herself might have heard it; but Will smiled and Rose blushed as he delivered it, and I understood then how hopeless my aunt's plans were.

It was my seventeenth birthday. I had brought my needlework into the orchard, and was sitting on the grass, where the boughs of the apple-trees made a pleasant shade, and was sewing now and then, by fits and starts, but thinking all the time. By-and-bye the garden door opened and shut, and a slow, sauntering step came down the path. I began to sew steadily then. I did not turn my head. It was only when Will stood just before me that I looked up. He threw away his cigar, put his hands into his pockets, and smiled down at me in a half-lazy, half-tender way. I went on sewing again, but those stitches were wrong, and I had, I remember, to pick them out next day.

"I like white gowns, you know," he said, musingly, after a minute, still looking down at me.

"Do you?" said I, with an involuntary glance at my own white gown, with the sunshine flecking it.

"Why don't other girls have their things made like that—all soft, you know, without any seams and edges?"

"Like this?" said I, looking up with a smile into the approving grey eyes bent down upon me. "There's no making in it. I made it myself. It's just a full body and a straight skirt; there's no trimming at all."

"It's white," said Will, a little vaguely. "Girls ought to wear white gowns: why don't they?"

"I don't know," said I. "I wear them because they wash."

Will looked up at the sky between the trees, and whistled softly to himself. Then his glance travelled downwards towards me again.

"It is your birthday to-day?" he said, in a lazy, questioning way.

"Yes."

"Do you like birthdays?"

"On the whole, I think not," I said, working more quickly, and making some pitifully irregular stitches to unpick.

"Why not?"

I hesitated. "I had birthdays when I was a child, you see," I said, foolishly, "and I always remember them."

"What have people been giving you for presents, Nell?"

I told him: "Letty made a pincushion for me. Rose gave me that song I sang last night."

There was a pause. "Girls wear locketts and trinkets and things sometimes," said Will, irrelevantly.

I laughed. "Yes, sometimes," I said.

"I suppose, now," said Will, "that you have plenty of things of that sort?"

I looked up wonderingly. His questions were a little purposeless, unless — But that thought was absurd! Was it likely that Will should be thinking of buying a present for me? What could be more *unlikely*! I was angry with myself for blushing.

"I have the ornaments mamma had when she was a girl," I said. "She gave them to me."

"Are there necklaces amongst them?" said Will. "I like necklaces, you know. But I daresay you have everything of that sort. Have you a pearl necklace, Nell?"

The question made me laugh. "No, nothing half so fine," I said.

Before Will had time to speak again, a clear, bell-like voice came from the other end of the garden: "Will! Will!"

"Here," shouted Will. "All right, Rose."

Rose was coming towards us, her sweet little fair face almost hidden by the garden hat she wore. "I have been looking everywhere for you," she said, addressing Will, who went to meet her. "Papa is wanting your advice about that colt Jackson wants to sell. Young Jackson has brought the colt up; and papa is in the yard, Will, and he wants you to go at once. Oh, Nell, *you* here!"

Will went slowly away, his hands in his pockets. Rose remained, seating herself on the grass and watching her cousin disappear.

"What do you and Will find to talk about?" she said pleasantly, when the garden door had closed.

"We have been talking about my frocks," I said lightly, with a little laugh. "When you came, Will was asking how many pearl necklaces I possessed."

Rose's clear blue eyes were regarding me a little anxiously. "Will talks great nonsense sometimes," she said. "You must not lay too much importance on what he says, Nell. He has been very kind to you lately—I have noticed it; but that is his way—he is kind to everyone —"

"Yes, of course," I said promptly; and then I hurriedly changed the subject. But Rose was very quiet. She sat watching me as I sewed, giving only half her attention, I think, to my impersonal talk.

"You are looking very happy now-a-days, Nell," she said wistfully, after a while.

"Am I?" said I—"that's because it's summer."

Rose did not look less wistful after that explanation. My contentment evidently worried her. We sat chatting for a little while longer, then she rose and went back to the house, leaving me alone. I said I should follow in a minute, but the minute passed and I did not go.

Half an hour passed; I was still there. I forgot my sewing. It dropped on the grass beside me. I clasped my hands behind my head, and leant back against the apple-tree and looked up, as Will had done, absently, at the patches of blue between the boughs. Rose was right—I was happy—very happy! Why should I not be happy? It was summer time, and no one scolded me if I freckled.

Suddenly I started. Someone was speaking not far away:—

"Of course, I know you do not mean anything, Will. But Nell may fancy you do. I think, for her sake, you ought to be careful."

The clear, ringing little voice came from the garden, just beyond the orchard wall. It was Rose who spoke.

The lazy voice that answered was Will's. "Why for *her* sake?" he said. "You don't think Nell is falling in love with me? That's not very likely, you know."

"But indeed, Will, it *is* likely. Nell quite changes when you are here. She brightens—she changes altogether; I have noticed it."

"Does she? That is very sweet of her."

"Will, be serious."

"I am serious—profoundly so. What do you want me to do, Rose?"

"I want you to be more careful."

"Careful! Good gracious, Rose, I *am* careful! Careful? Why, I think of every word I say to her; I carefully reflect upon every sentence; I never was so careful with *anyone* as I am in my intercourse with Nell. I plane out every atom of meaning from my voice and my words and my very looks. I should like you to tell me how I am to be more careful than I am."

The voices were growing fainter in the distance. But I caught what Rose said. "Then you, too, have seen the danger?" she asked.

"What danger?"

"Of Nell's mistaking —— " Then the voices passed, and I heard no more.

My hands were still clasping one another, in careless, happy fashion, behind my head. I unclasped them. I sought about for my needlework. The needle had slipped out and was lost in the long grass. I remember that I searched for it as though its loss were an important matter. At last I found it. Then I went away slowly, homewards.

The sky was as blue as ever. The sunshine was warm on the lawn, the birds were singing loudly; in the house, every window was open, and the curtains waved lightly in the gentle breeze. It was still summer. My heart was as cheerless as December.

II.

DINNER was over. Aunt Maria was laying down the law on some point of social etiquette to Rose and Uncle Richard, who were listening deferentially. Letty was singing her last Italian song. Will was leaning against the chimney-piece close to my chair, and kindly trying to talk to me.

At last I succeeded in escaping from the drawing-room. I went slowly upstairs in the dim light, and into the little shabby school-room, where Letty and I had written endless *thèmes* and *dictées* six months ago. I stood by the open window looking out.

I had been standing there two minutes, perhaps, when a step came along the corridor and stopped in the doorway.

"May I come in, Nell?" said Will, in a shamefaced, awkward sort of way; and he did so without waiting for permission. "I've brought you a little birthday-present," he continued, carelessly, holding out an untidy little paper package; "it's not much of a thing, you know—but I wanted to find out whether you had one already. And if you don't like it, I'll get something else."

I think I took the parcel and opened it in order to gain time. The untidy brown paper rolled off and revealed a little flat morocco case, and, lying on the soft lining of the case, was a little pearl necklace, pure and white. My heart was beating fast, my cheeks were burning, as I held out his present to give it back to him.

"I cannot have it," I said, childishly, ungraciously, because no suitable words would come. "I do not want it."

"Nell!"

"Please take it back," I said; and he took it humbly.

"I asked Uncle Richard about it, Nell," he said, awkwardly. "He thought there was no harm in my giving it. We are as good as cousins, you know—and I give Rose and Letty birthday-presents."

I said nothing. I looked out of the window again, down on the lawn and the lengthening shadows. My heart was swelling with indignation. "We are as good as cousins!" He had thought it needful to remind me that the gift was a cousinly gift, no more!—Was I so likely to mistake?

"Do accept it, Nell."

I shook my head. I think I was afraid to speak. Tears were very near, and I would not for the world have wept.

"Why will you not accept it?—Tell me."

I was forced to speak then. I answered almost fiercely. "I should hate it!" I said, passionately; and then I fled from the room, and upstairs to my bedroom, where I locked my door and cast myself down on the floor and cried as I had never cried in my life before.

Will went away next day. Aunt Maria wondered why he went so soon; but I could not wonder, for I heard Rose explain the reason lucidly to Letty.

"It's Nell," she said; "poor little Nell is half in love with him, and I think he sees it. He will not come down again for some time, he says, and I cannot help thinking he is wise."

"He shouldn't have flirted with her," said Letty, tersely.

"He wanted to be kind," retorted Rose, excusingly.

"Nonsense!" said Letty, who had something of Aunt Maria's decision of speech; "he flirted! If anyone had asked my opinion I should have said he was in love with her. No wonder she thought so too."

Rose sighed a little at Letty's hardness. "At all events he means to be careful now," she said; "he says he planes out every atom of meaning from his tone and words when he addresses her."

Three months passed before Will came again to see us. He came one Saturday and went away again on Monday, and he seemed to have come from some sense of duty rather than for pleasure, for he had little to say to anyone. He had nothing at all to say to me, though once or twice, looking up, I caught his glance fixed upon me anxiously. He had not needed on this visit to plane all meaning from his words, for he had scarcely addressed me once.

He did not come again till winter. Aunt Maria had taken the girls to town for a day or two—Uncle Richard was lunching with a friend that day. I had been to the village, and it was late in the afternoon when I returned home. The drawing-room was in darkness; the candles had not been lighted yet, and the fire was dull. I crossed the room, and sat down on the rug, stirring the dull fire into a blaze, and I think I sighed once or twice, for it was a little dull with the girls away. Then I became conscious that I was not alone. Someone came slowly across the room into the firelight and held out his hand to me.

"Nell," he said.

"What! Will?" I cried; and I am afraid that he knew I was glad—too glad—to see him.

"You did not expect me," he said. "I did not write. It was only this morning that I made up my mind to come."

"It is unfortunate," I returned, "for everyone is away. Aunt Maria and the girls are in London."

"I did not come to see Aunt Maria and the girls; I came to see you, Nell. You—you and Uncle Richard, you know," he added, in an explanatory way.

"Uncle Richard will be here presently," I said hastily.

There was a pause. I wished I could look at Will and speak naturally and be at ease. I gazed steadily away from him into the fire, conscious all the while that he was reading my face and interpreting my misery.

Nell," he said gently, after a while: "I have offended you in some way. I wish you would tell me what I have done. I made you angry about that necklace. I'm awfully sorry. I thought you might

like it, you know, and I wanted to give you something, because—because, you see, it was your birthday, and we're cousins."

I was saved from the necessity of answering. At that moment the door opened and Uncle Richard entered. I went away to change my dress, leaving uncle and nephew together.

The dinner that night was a very silent meal. Will and my uncle seemed to have quarrelled; Uncle Richard looked irate, Will gloomy. They stayed behind when I left the dining-room, and when they came into the drawing-room, nearly an hour later, Will looked more gloomy and my gentle uncle more irate than ever.

"I'm going again to-morrow, Nell," Will said, as he stood on the landing, and gave my candle to me, when I was shaking hands and saying good-night to him.

"To-morrow!" I repeated.

"Yes. Uncle Richard is sending me away. And perhaps he is right, you know. Good-bye, Nell; I shall be gone before you are up to-morrow."

"Good-bye," I answered. And I was pleased to think that my tone was as careless and matter-of-fact as his own. "It is a little cold for travelling, but I hope you will have a pleasant journey; it is quite fine to-night—starlight, see. Good-night—good-bye." And then I went lightly, smilingly upstairs, and tried to sing as I brushed my hair, and looked out of window at the cold, grey, starlit sky, and tried to sing again, and finally cried myself to sleep.

The days and weeks and months passed very slowly after that. February went by; Will did not come again. I remembered every day why he did not come—he needed to be "careful" lest I should fall in love with him—and the remembrance was always enough to make my cheeks burn with shame and indignation. March, April, May passed. June came; and to-morrow would be the twenty-eighth of June, my birthday.

I had taken my sewing into the orchard again, for Aunt Maria was scolding everyone indoors. It was a pleasant day. The sunshine was hot on the grass, but a gentle breeze was touching the tree-tops and making a cheerful flutter and rustle in the air. I remember all that now; at the time I do not think I noticed anything cheerful about the day. The seam I was sewing was long and a little dull—and what was there to do when the seam was done?

The garden-gate opened, and swung slowly to again. I looked round quickly. There was Will. He was coming towards me, winding his way between the trees.

I let my work fall and rose up to meet him. He took the hand I held out to him, and for a moment or two he stood looking down, saying nothing. It was almost as though he had been hungering and thirsting for a sight of me. If I had not known better, I might have thought that Will loved me.

"I wish you could say you are glad to see me, Nell," he said.

"I can say so," I replied, careful not to speak too warmly.

"But not *very* glad—not as glad as I am to see you," he cried : and I let him have it so. I knew how glad I was, but it was as well that he should not know.

"I have come to wish you many happy returns of the day," he continued.

I looked up at him wonderingly. But I remembered that he was "always kind to everyone."

"You have come a day too soon, then," I said quietly.

"Yes, I know. I grew impatient as the end of my time drew near. Uncle Richard forbade me to speak to you until you were eighteen, Nell—but these last twelve months have been a fierce trial to my patience and endurance. Yesterday I felt I could stand it no longer, and I have come. Nell, say anything to me—tell me to wait—make me wait fifty years if you will, only give me some hope that at the end of the fifty years you will listen to me. Do not send me away altogether."

"Send you away, Will ? I do not understand," I said.

"Nell, I love you. I want you for my wife."

I looked up at him steadily, searchingly. The conversation I had heard between him and Rose came back to me. Came back to me ? Had it ever been absent from my thoughts ? "Thank you, Will," I replied ; "I am very sorry, but I *must* send you away."


"Then send me away with a little hope. Nell, I have waited patiently all this year—I have obeyed Uncle Richard—I have not spoken to you—you do not know what it has been to wait and say nothing. You were too young, he declared, to know whether you loved or were indifferent. He had married my Aunt when she was seventeen, and she had reproached him ever since. He made me promise to say nothing until your eighteenth birthday. I have been slavishly obedient to him—I put a guard on my tongue, on my very tones ; and when that became too hard I stayed away. Nell, it is six months since I have even caught a glimpse of you. Give me a little hope to carry away with me now."

I do not know what I said. Somehow Will understood. When, an hour later, we went back to the house, I had promised that I would marry him.

"Aunt Maria will prophesy repentance for you, Nell," he whispered, as we entered the house.

"I think she will prophesy repentance for you," I said.

I think she prophesied repentance for us both. But that was ten years ago and we have not repented yet.



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY was born in August, 1792, at his father's country seat of Field Place in Sussex. The Shelleys were a good old family, and young Percy was the heir presumptive to a baronetcy. His grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, who was still alive when he was born, and lived for many years after, is said to have been a man full of quaint, clever eccentricity, a fact which may, in some measure, perhaps, account for his grandson's genius.

Little Percy was, from the first, a strange, unexpected nestling in the home. His parents had never dreamt of having such a son, and from the beginning they did not quite know what to do with him. He was physically delicate; he was sensitive; he was imaginative; from his earliest childhood he wrote verses instead of playing with his toys; a harsh glance made him cry, and sweetstuff made him sick; how could such an incomprehensible changeling have found the way into the strictly orthodox nursery at Field Place, mother and nurse and aunt asked themselves in bewildered consternation.

The boy was first sent to school at Wareham, then at Brentford. He was bright and intelligent in his studies, and gifted with a most remarkable and retentive memory. He was a great reader, though he never especially excelled in the one aim and object of all school learning in those days, classical knowledge. He was not a great favourite with either his teachers or companions; none of them seem to have understood him; he was too proud, too fanciful, too reserved to be popular.

From Brentford he went to Eton, where his character was much the same as it had been in his earlier boyhood. He met here, however, among the tutors, with a Dr. Lind, who was probably the first real friend Percy Bysshe Shelley ever had. Dr. Lind, who must have had a keen eye for boys, discerned that there was something uncommon in young Shelley, and took pains to draw him out and develop his mind. He helped him in his chemical studies, of which he was at this period deeply enamoured; he cultivated his taste; he treated with respect his many strange, sensitive fancies. When, during one of his holidays, the lad had a dangerous fever, which so greatly affected his excitable brain and irritable nervous system that his father talked of sending him, on his convalescence, to a lunatic asylum, Dr. Lind flew to him, and ministered to him so soothingly, and managed him so well, that before very long he took him back with him quite cured, both in mind and body, to Eton.

Thus far Dr. Lind's influence over young Shelley was productive of good; but in one respect it is to be lamented. The lad had already a sceptical turn, and his master and friend, himself a sceptic, en-

couraged it. The result was that his religious faith grew more and more unsettled, until he gained before he left Eton the title of "Shelley, the Atheist."

At Eton young Shelley flashed often into brilliant Latin verse, and began to write English poetry which was already worth something. Pliny was his favourite Latin book; his affection for natural history made him love it so well that he translated more than half of it into English.

Young Shelley's devotion to the study of natural history and chemistry, did not, however, always lead to such peaceful and scholarly results as copying out pages of Pliny in his mother tongue. One day the inhabitants of the cottages round a certain common near Eton were startled by a resounding crash. Out flew dames and damsels, children and grandsires, screaming that the French were come—a possible event which, in those days, haunted all timid minds. But what they saw was no advancing Gallic column. It was one of their favourite old trees, which grew on the border of the common, descending to earth, shattered into splinters, after a most unaccountable flight which it had taken skyward. After some enquiry, the mystery was cleared up. Master Percy Shelley had been trying to ignite gunpowder by means of a burning glass, and had succeeded so thoroughly that he had blown up the tree.

Shelley's departure from Eton was of a sudden and not very pleasant character. He was not a favourite, in general, with his school-fellows, who took, many of them, a mischievous pleasure in provoking his sensitive, irritable pride. At length, one day, one of them carried so far this dangerous game, that young Shelley took out his penknife, and, in a fit of ungovernable passion, drove it into his tormenter's hand. The result was that the culprit was brought before the head master, Dr. Keates, and summarily dismissed from the school.

The circumstance was, no doubt, a very distasteful one to all at Field Place; but Shelley himself does not seem to have been greatly troubled by it. He began already to give much of his time to literature, and was probably most fully, according to his own opinions, indemnified for all passing disgrace at Eton by some of his poems finding their way into print, and by his receiving £40 from a publisher for a romance called "*Zastrozzi*." This latter was a remarkable book for a lad of seventeen; but it has died a natural death, as perhaps it deserved to do.

Having thus made his first appearance in print, Shelley did the next orthodox thing for a young poet: he fell satisfactorily and comfortably in love. The object of his affection was his pretty cousin, Harriet Grove, who seems fully to have returned his feelings. For some time the pair were allowed to correspond, and, though so young, were regarded in a certain way as promised to each other.

Shelley now went to Oxford, where he did not especially distinguish himself in the ordinary collegiate fashion, though he did in another

but not exactly desirable way. His chief friend at the University was a Mr. Jefferson Hogg, a man of cultivation and talent. The pair put their heads together and produced a volume of poems, which was published under the title of "Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson." Margaret Nicholson was a poor mad woman who had attempted the life of George the Third and had since died in confinement. The title of the book is sufficient to make us understand that it was not precisely the sort of production for College dons to regard with a favourable eye.

This literary escapade would, however, probably have been overlooked, had it not been for another and more serious offence. Shelley now began to develop openly his sceptical proclivities, and at length published a pamphlet entitled "The Necessity of Atheism." Hereupon the College authorities rose in a storm of indignant wrath, and young Shelley was expelled from the University, as he had been from Eton.

Shelley no doubt regarded himself as a martyr, but the satisfaction of looking upon himself in this light was a good deal dimmed by two circumstances: his father refused him any further allowance, and Miss Grove's relations insisted upon her breaking off all further connection with him.

A bankrupt thus in purse and heart, Shelley went and lived in London, making the most he could out of his brains. His sisters, who had always taken a certain pride in him, made a little collection for him out of their pocket-money, and, not being allowed to give it him themselves, confided the task of carrying it to him to an old schoolfellow of theirs—a Miss Harriet Westbrook, a pretty girl, who came of a designing family: an all too dangerous ambassador to be sent to a youthful, susceptible poet.

If Shelley had lived in the days of Astrology, it surely would have fallen out that, on the night of his birth, the name of "Harriet" would have been seen written in starry characters in the sky. No sooner was he free from one young lady of that name than he was entangled with another who bore it. Harriet Westbrook was a pretty blonde, well-endowed as to hair, but poorly as to brains, of which commodity, however, her elder sister, Eliza, possessed a double share. Mr. Westbrook, the father, was a retired innkeeper. Consequently the visits of the presumptive heir to a baronetcy to his house, and the fact that he was evidently attracted thither by the charms of the youngest daughter, were regarded as rare treasures which must be cultivated for the general family good. Perspicacious Eliza made up her mind that the half-ensnared quarry should not be allowed to escape.

Shelley most decidedly never regarded Harriet Westbrook with any deep affection. It was a passing fancy awakened in a young poet's soul by a fair face. It is probable that at this period Harriet Grove was still, in reality, his heart's queen, and that he began his sentimental

flirtation with Harriet Westbrook merely with the feeling that it would help to blot out sad memories. He let himself, however, be heedlessly drawn on and on, the art of sister Eliza and the bright eyes of Harriet both combining to work the spell, until in an unwary moment, he asked Harriet to elope with him. The matter was supposed to be a secret between the lovers, but no doubt on the night when the elopement took place, the whole Westbrook family were sleeping with one eye open and with both ears very wide open indeed. The pair fled to Edinburgh, and on their arrival there, Shelley, though probably he was already beginning to repent his hasty act, was too much of a gentleman to do anything but marry the girl who had left her home and forfeited her reputation for his sake.

Mr. Timothy Shelley was now induced to make his son the small allowance of two hundred a-year, and upon this and the fruit of his pen the young couple lived. In the course of a year or two after his marriage, Shelley wrote and published "*The Revolt of Islam*," which brought him at once much fame and some money, and immediately and thoroughly established his name as a poet. It is inferior to his later works, but no just critic could fail to own that the poem bore upon it the trade-mark of original genius.

Shelley and his wife led a wandering life. Now they were living in Wales, now in Devonshire, now in Ireland. Go where they might, however, they had always with them a so-called domestic blessing in the shape of Miss Eliza Westbrook. That young lady was resolved to keep as close as she could to her embryo-baronet brother-in-law. She insisted upon it that dear Harriet and the babies, who were arriving periodically, could not get on without her, and she stuck with affectionate persistency to the side of the pair. It is probable that her presence helped to widen the rapidly-growing breach between Shelley and his wife, who every day was growing more and more distasteful to him. The charm her personal attractions had at first had, in some degree, for him, had quickly staled with custom, and he had found how utterly inadequate the shallow soul and uncultivated mind behind the pretty face were to satisfy his ideal of a life's companion. Shelley, however, still for a while treated her with outward respect, and even re-married her in London in order to make more certain of the legitimacy of their children.

But it was impossible that such a loose tie as bound him to Harriet could hold with security a man of Shelley's character and opinions. He met in society Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and at once the two were drawn with irresistible attraction towards each other. Shelley had no fixed religious principles to restrain him; his home with Harriet and her officious, meddling sister was thoroughly unsympathetic and cold to him; Mary loved him, and showed it in every look and tone. Thus it came to pass that, before many months had gone by, he and Mary were living together on the Continent, and Harriet Shelley was left alone with her children.

To make a painful story short, Mrs. Shelley at first bewailed her position far more because of the many unpleasant things it brought upon her than because of any strong love she had borne her husband. She then drifted into some connection in which her affections were concerned, and on the breaking off of this liaison, went and deliberately drowned herself.

Upon Harriet's death Shelley at once married Mary Wollstonecraft, to whom his attachment grew more and more devoted and tender. She was a woman of great talent and high intellectual attainments ; a woman who could feel with him *and* think with him ; a woman who had given herself to him heart and soul. Her influence over Shelley was no doubt high and noble, and when we blame her misconduct we must first remember that she was brought up in a free and easy code with regard to morality. Shelley's married life with her was all sunshine as far as she was concerned ; he never, in the faintest degree, swerved in his allegiance to her. It was an ideal union of a poet and a woman of letters : for Mary Shelley was an authoress of no small repute in her time, and had Shelley met her before he fell in with Harriet Westbrook and her family, his story would have been without more than one shadow which now rests upon it.

On the death of his grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, the poet inherited an income of a thousand a-year, which put him and his household into easy circumstances for the rest of his life. He took a house at Marlow, in Buckinghamshire, and there he and Mrs. Shelley lived for two years. During this period much of his time was spent in going about among the poor of the neighbourhood, performing deeds of the most devoted, self-forgetting love and charity. He even walked a London hospital in order that he might be able to better minister to the weak and suffering around him. He nursed one bad case of ophthalmia so assiduously that he caught the disease himself and suffered from it very severely.

We have no space here to discuss Shelley's religious opinions. In his boyhood and early manhood the bark of his atheism was probably much worse than its bite. His acts of self-sacrificing love and pity among the poor were certainly most christian-like, and there are some lines in "Prometheus Unbound," which awaken a hope that, before he died, a ray of light from above had shone into his soul.

Shelley's was a most thoroughly true, consistent character. He was so perfectly faithful to his convictions, that, when he first married, he forfeited two thousand a-year because he refused to go against his principles by entailing his property. He has been accused of telling strange romances about himself, and his doings, and adventures ; but this was no doubt partly owing to his excitable natural imagination, and partly to the effect produced upon his nerves by the frequent use of laudanum, which he had contracted a bad habit of taking in order to gain relief from a painful disease to which he was all his life subject.

The most prolific period of Shelley's genius was after his marriage with Mary Wollstonecraft. It was then that all his master-pieces sprang, one after another, in radiant strength from his brain. No doubt the depth of calm which there was in his love for Mary, and her discerning influence in making him turn all his powers in their right direction, and her judicious criticisms, had something to do with the rich development of his poetic gift during these years.

When Shelley gave up his house at Marlow, he went with his wife and children to Italy, where the rest of his life was spent, residing now at one Italian city, now at another. An especially bright and interesting picture flashes before us of the period he spent at Pisa. We see a face of wondrous, manly beauty—yet a face that tells a terrible tale of glorious gifts misused, of evil passions given their evil way—close to that of Shelley, and we know it is that of Byron, who met him at Pisa and became his intimate friend. We see most lustrous, dark, Italian eyes shining graciously on him, and we know they are the eyes of the Countess Guiccioli. We see a lovely Italian girl looking up into Shelley's face with rapt devotion in her gaze, and we know that this is the Countess Emilia Viviani, a young Italian lady whom our English poet most chivalrously aided in her escape from imprisonment in a convent and in other troubles. We see a man, with singularly kindly intelligence written on his brow, holding close communion with Shelley, and we know that he is Leigh Hunt.

But the closing scene is at hand, and we must glance at it. In 1822, Mr. and Mrs. Shelley took a house on the Riviera with a Lieutenant Williams and his wife, congenial friends whom they had learned to know and love in Italy. The Casa Magna, the name of the house thus jointly inhabited, was situated between Lerica and Sant Arenzo. Part of the time of their residence there was employed at Genoa by the two gentlemen in superintending the building of a little schooner which was destined to be a yacht for cruising in the Mediterranean. The vessel was, no doubt, an object of pleasant interest to the amateur ship-builders, but they had far better have kept it as a mere toy model than have thought of using it as a seaworthy craft.

In this schooner Shelley sailed to Leghorn to visit Leigh Hunt and discuss with him a project for starting a magazine. The journey to Leghorn was accomplished in safety, but on the voyage back, a sudden squall came on and the vessel sank with all on board.

Such is the story of Shelley, a great genius whom we love in spite of all his many errors.

ALICE KING.

THE MISSING RUBIES.

BY SARAH DOUDNEY.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE BRIDGE.

BEATRICE struggled resolutely with herself for a few seconds, and wiped away her tears. But the face that she lifted to Aunt Jane was pale and sad.

"I am sorry to have been so foolish," she said quietly. "Your words are not to blame at all. I was not happy when I came out this morning."

Jane Earle's kind heart yearned to comfort the girl.

"I hope you have had no bad news, my dear?" she said, laying a hand on Beatrice's arm, and looking at her with sympathising eyes.

"No—not that. But Mr. Redburn has been saying cruel things about some one I love."

Was there ever yet an old maid who did not prick up her ears at the first hint of a love affair? Jane had always been more romantic than her sisters. And it was so seldom that any girl came to her with a love story to tell, that she could not refrain from encouraging Beatrice to speak on.

"Ah, that is very hard," she sighed. "Perhaps he thinks you are too young to—well—to decide on a certain important matter."

"I am nineteen; that is not very young. No; my youth has nothing to do with the things he has said. He has taken a most unwarrantable dislike to the man I am engaged to marry."

"But why—why, my dear child?"

"Because his mind has been poisoned," replied Beatrice, her deep eyes looking steadily into Aunt Jane's placid face. "Because Colonel Lindrick has told him that there is a stain upon my lover's character. Because Godwin is falsely accused of stealing the Countess Gradizoff's ruby necklace."

Jane Earle took a step backward, and leaned for support against the brickwork of the bridge. Giving one quick glance along the road to make sure that no one was near, she gazed out her next question.

"Do you mean that you are engaged to my nephew?"

"I have been engaged to him ever since December," answered Beatrice, with quiet frankness. "And of course he has told me everything. You don't know that he is working hard to pay the full

value of the necklace. You don't know that Mr. Corder has taken him by the hand, and is helping him to get on in the world?"

"Mr. Corder!" echoed Jane, with a little shudder. "That vulgar old man!"

"He is not vulgar. He is quick-sighted, and honourable, and true. When you all turned your backs upon your dead brother's only child, he believed in him, and rescued him from poverty and despair. Your hearts have hardened against the little boy who played at your knees, and lisped his first words into your ears. But he is not utterly forsaken."

Jane Earle's lips were quivering, and tears had begun to trickle over her wax-like cheeks. She had rested her basket of flowers on the edge of the parapet, but her trembling fingers lost their hold upon the handle, and it fell into the stream.

"Think what he must have suffered," Beatrice went on. "No, you cannot think. Only God knows how bitter that suffering was. I shall go home as quickly as I can—I do not want Mr. Redburn's money. I want Godwin; that is all."

There was a moment's pause, filled up by the loud singing of the merry stream. And then Jane Earle began to speak in a tremulous voice.

"I have always loved the poor boy," she said. "But what could we say or do—Dorothy and I? He offered to take charge of the necklace; that was the worst part of it all; that is what Caroline cannot forget. And we thought—we feared—that he had deposited it with some one who would lend him money on it. Those things are often done, I believe, when men are in distress; but I do not understand such transactions. It is all too hard for me. Poor dear Godwin, I have never forgotten him. Give him my love, and say that his aunt Jane prays for him every night."

"Bid me say that you believe in him. That would be a greater comfort," answered Beatrice softly.

The old lady lifted her hand with a helpless gesture.

"I don't know whether I ought to believe in him or not. But, yes, yes—say anything that you think right. I like you for loving him so well. What a spirit you have! You would even have dared to say all this to Caroline. There is no one near; and I will kiss you, my dear, just for poor Godwin's sake."

Beatrice stepped nearer to the poor, shaken old woman, and received and returned her kiss.

No sooner was the little ceremony over, than Jane bethought herself of all that was due to her position as a Miss Earle. Supposing any of the townsfolk should come along, and find her crying on the bridge! She had a vague fear that her mantle was twisted, and her bonnet all awry. And then there was the loss of the basket—Dorothy's own favourite basket. What would they think when she went home, and confessed that she had dropped it into the stream?

"Don't cry any more," said Beatrice, arranging her dress with gentle hand. "Your bonnet is all right, and your eyes are only a little red. I am afraid I have done wrong to upset you so much. But when I am gone, you will think of me kindly, and I shall talk of you to Godwin, often, in the days that are to come."

Somewhat soothed, poor gentle Aunt Jane took her leave of this strange girl, whom she liked and feared, after the fashion of timid people. And then she went homeward, through the cowslip meadows, still lamenting the lost basket, and sighing and murmuring to herself. But before she had crossed the last field that divided her from the house, she had grown a little calmer, and had even stooped to gather a few more cowslips.

"I will say nothing of this at home," she thought. "If only Caroline does not see anything unusual in me I can keep the affair to myself. Dorothy will be vexed about the basket, and I shall pretend that I was afraid of her anger. Dear, dear, I don't like pretending anything; but what am I to do? It is all so puzzling, and so confusing!"

After lingering a little longer on the old bridge, Beatrice, too, turned back to the high road, and retraced her steps to Colonel Lindrick's garden gate. She felt unusually tired and spent. Her heart ached with a dull pain, and there were throbbing pulses in her temples. The long garden path was deserted by all save the bees and birds, who seemed to welcome her return with jubilant hum and song. She gained the house without being observed, and met no one but the parlour-maid as she went upstairs.

"Say to Miss Lindrick that I hope she will excuse me at luncheon," she said, wearily. "My head aches, and I will lie down for an hour or two."

A few minutes later there was a knock at the door of her room, and the maid entered with wine and sandwiches, and a kind message from Alma. Beatrice ate and drank a little, and then lay down on a comfortable couch in a shady corner, and closed her eyes, longing earnestly for a spell of forgetfulness.

She had not expected that sleep would come; but she was overwrought and over-worn, and her eyes quickly closed. Her slumber was long and deep; it was not broken by any sounds in the house, nor by the noise of wheels on the carriage-drive. She woke at last, just as a little clock on the mantelpiece was striking four; and then, for an instant or two, she wondered where she was.

The sleep had left her strengthened and refreshed. She rose, washed her face, smoothed her hair, and went quietly downstairs into the drawing-room.

Colonel Lindrick and his daughter were there together, talking with grave faces and low tones. The entrance startled them a little, but they met her with the kindest inquiries.

"Are you feeling better?" asked Alma, coming forward anxiously.

"We were afraid that Mr. Redburn upset you very much this morning."

"He has upset himself," said Colonel Lindrick, with a seriousness that was real enough. "If he goes on in this way I don't believe he will live through the year. In his state of health a hurried journey to town is simply madness!"

"A journey to town," cried Beatrice. "Why has he gone to town?"

"Did you not know?" said Alma, quickly. "Did you not see him drive off in the carriage at half-past two?"

"I saw and heard nothing; I have been soundly asleep for hours. But what can have taken him so suddenly to town?"

"Did he say anything this morning about law-business?" asked the Colonel quietly. "Was there no hint of this journey?"

"Nothing at all was said about business. We had a most unpleasant talk, and both lost our tempers. If," added Beatrice, haughtily, "he has gone to make a fresh will in which my name is not mentioned, I shall be unfeignedly thankful."

"My dear young lady, I hope you did not make that remark in his presence," said the Colonel, in a tone of kind remonstrance. "You must not be so impetuous, you know. You must have more regard for your own interests."

Alma was watching her narrowly. Beatrice met her glance with a cold smile.

"My conversation with Miss Lindrick yesterday has been repeated to Mr. Redburn," she said. "He did not know I was engaged to Godwin Earle, and the news has made him quite furious."

Alma coloured slightly.

"If I have made mischief, I am very sorry," she declared. "I did mention our conversation to papa, I admit."

"And I mentioned it to Redburn," confessed Colonel Lindrick frankly. "I did not know, however, that he was unacquainted with the fact of your engagement, Miss Ward. I, too, am sorry if I have made mischief."

"I have refused to give up Godwin Earle at Mr. Redburn's bidding," said Beatrice, in a steady voice. "I do not acknowledge his right to issue commands to me. And I have told him—plainly told him—that I wished he would find some other girl who would be more grateful for his benefits."

CHAPTER XX.

WHY MR. REDBURN WENT TO LONDON.

ALMA looked at her father—he was looking at Beatrice, with an expression half of pity, half of admiration.

"You have been very, very unwise, Miss Ward," he said, shaking his head. "I am afraid Redburn will take you at your word."

"I am afraid he won't," she replied, with evident sincerity.

"Was he not very angry when you made that speech?" Alma asked.

"No; he suddenly cooled down, and told me he could not so easily resign his adopted daughter. Then he added something about having excited himself, and said he should not see me at luncheon."

There was a brief silence. Colonel Lindrick, who was really puzzled, handed Beatrice a cup of tea, with an absent air which was unusual in him.

"I can't imagine what can have made Redburn start off to town," he said gravely. "He has taken Blake with him, but he means to return to-night. It is enough to kill him."

"I thought he always told you all his plans," Beatrice remarked. "It seems strange that he has not confided in you to-day."

"Very strange. I hope he may not be going a little wrong in his head."

"It is my belief that he is," said Alma, pouring out tea for herself. "People with those violent tempers often drive themselves mad. He looked very odd, papa, when he asked you to order the carriage."

"He cut me short when I began to remonstrate," observed the Colonel, rising and slowly pacing the room. "He was evidently determined to carry out his whim, whatever it was."

After taking a few more turns, he quitted the room, and the two women were left to themselves. In Alma's mind there were no longer any bitter thoughts of Beatrice. Her jealousy had never been a very strong feeling, and it was now thoroughly overcome. This girl, she thought, was a romantic fool, who could only be made happy in one way.

"I wish I could make things pleasanter for you, my dear child," she said kindly. "But everything here seems to conspire against your happiness in the most extraordinary way. I really am afraid you will never get on with Mr. Redburn."

Beatrice, leaning back in her chair, gave a weary little sigh.

"I never shall," she answered simply. "He will have to let me take my own course. I am sure you mean to be kind, Miss Lindrick, but you cannot perhaps quite realise ——"

She paused and blushed.

"I do realise everything now," Alma said, with the utmost gentleness. "At first I own I did not. But I have thought the matter over, and I am sure you are quite right to listen to the voice of your own heart."

"It is kind of you to say this," Beatrice answered warmly.

"I am not naturally romantic," Alma went on. "And perhaps I am more swayed by worldly considerations than you could ever be. Yet I think it is very charming to see such devotion as yours. I hope Godwin will do his best to deserve it all; and, indeed, I dare say he will. You have my best wishes for your own happiness and his."

Then Beatrice did what any girl in such circumstances would have done. She got up and touched Alma's cheek with her lips.

Miss Lindrick was not, as we know, a woman of much heart. But the soft touch seemed to linger oddly on her cheek, after Beatrice had gone away to her own room.

She had not been over-kindly disposed to this fresh young girl who had consoled Godwin for the loss of his first love, and had been presented to everybody as Mr. Redburn's heiress. But it was plain that Beatrice did not glory in her triumphs. She simply wanted to love and be loved in peace.

"I do wish her well—I have not told any falsehoods," said Alma to herself. "She is so perfectly straightforward and natural that I believe I have a sort of liking for her. Poor silly child! Why is it that such a girl should worship such a man as Godwin Earle? I suppose they will marry somehow, either with or without money, and he will go calmly through life with her, accepting her devotion. And yet—it is quite possible that he will love her very dearly; better even than he ever loved me."

Then the Colonel re-entered the drawing-room, and his daughter began to speculate afresh about old Redburn's mysterious journey.

"He has no friends in town," said Colonel Lindrick. "This must be simply a mad freak. He has lived in a passion for days. I never saw such a violent man in my life. If he is not closely looked after he will go out of the world in one of these rages."

"The world is not much the better for his being in it," said Alma, who disliked all excitable people. "If he stays here long he will wear us all out."

"Oh, he won't live long enough for that," her father replied.

Mr. Redburn had given orders that no carriage was to be sent to the station. It was nine o'clock when Beatrice had gone upstairs, leaving Alma sitting in the drawing-room, and waiting anxiously for the expected traveller.

They had not long to wait. At half-past ten the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue, and Colonel Lindrick himself went to the hall-door to welcome his guest. It was a clear, soft night. The light from the entry streamed out through the open door, and shone on the muffled-up figure that slowly descended from the fly, with Blake's assistance. The Colonel met him with a cheery word of greeting, and led him at once to the drawing-room fire.

"I have stood the journey uncommonly well, Lindrick," said the old man, looking proudly round. "Where's Beatrice? Gone to her room? So much the better. I don't think she will try to set her will against mine again!"

"I'm sorry you found her so hard to manage," remarked the Colonel, in his quietest tone.

"And I am sorry, too," Alma added. "But really, Mr. Redburn, I am afraid she will never be persuaded to give him up."

"But what if he has consented to give her up? Ha, ha, ha!" laughed old Redburn, with a grating sound that made his hearers start. "I suppose you never thought of that, did you? Eh?"

He was not a pleasant sight to look upon just then, with his fiery old eyes shining out of his yellow face.

"No; we never thought of that," the Colonel admitted, rather blankly.

"Well, I did. I remembered that the scamp had good blood in his veins, and I made up my mind to appeal to his sense of honour. That Milton woman gave me his address. I went straight to his office in Aldersgate Street, and asked for a private interview."

"And you saw him?" the Colonel asked.

"I saw him, with good results. I reminded him that when Beatrice gave him her promise she was without prospects, almost alone in the world. I asked whether it was fair to entrap a young girl into an engagement with a man whose name was not unstained? I told him that her father would have required another kind of suitor for his child, and added that I was that father's representative. And, lastly, I declared that if he still held Beatrice to that childish promise of hers, it would cost her a handsome fortune. Not a shilling of mine, I said, should go to a husband who had a single spot upon his character."

Again he glanced round proudly, as if expecting applause. But his two listeners were utterly silent.

"He looked as if he had been shot," went on the old man remorselessly. "Turned a ghastly white, and could hardly get out his words. He said something about my unwarrantable language, but agreed to write to Beatrice this very night and set her free. That was all. When he had said that, he fairly turned me out of the room and shut the door in my face. But I had got all that I wanted. Ha, ha! I was not going to let the girl take her fate into her own hands, as she threatened to do to-day!"

"But how will she bear this?" asked the Colonel, speaking at last.

"Bear it? Didn't you say, yourself, that a girl of nineteen may change her mind twenty times a year? Her fancy for Earle was sheer obstinacy."

"You have taken a course which will make her more obstinate still. Believe me, Redburn, it would have been wiser to let that fancy die a natural death."

"Pooh! When she gets his letter it will be all over."

Colonel Lindrick shook his head.

"If you had not opposed her, she would probably have got tired of him. Time, and the free use of money, and a knowledge of the world, would have taught her to set a higher value on herself. But now ——"

"So you think I have made a mistake, do you? What does Alma say?"

"Nothing," returned Alma, looking at the old man with a smile. "Only, I think you ought to get some rest. Doctor Bendall, you know, is coming to see you to-morrow. Do not let him find you looking any the worse for your journey."

Mr. Redburn was touched by her thoughtful care for his health. He said good-night to her with marked cordiality, and went away to his room, attended, as usual, by the faithful Blake.

"Well?" said the Colonel, looking ruefully at his daughter. "I don't think our chance is as good as it was. This is an unlucky move for us."

"Perhaps not," Alma answered. "My belief is that he will stir up Beatrice's undying hatred. I shall not be surprised if she refuses ever to see him again."

"But if Earle really does give her up ——"

"She will not be given up." Alma laughed a little. "Don't be astonished if she does not appear at breakfast to-morrow."

"What do you suppose she will do? By George, Alma, you don't fancy that she may put an end to herself?"

"No." Alma laughed again. "But I am firmly persuaded that she will run away."

CHAPTER XXI.

RUNNING AWAY.

BEATRICE slept soundly all night, and woke feeling refreshed and strengthened. The first post, she thought, would be sure to bring her a letter from Godwin. She would never repeat to him any of those cruel things that Mr. Redburn had said. But she must tell him frankly that she had tried to bear with the old man's domineering temper, and had failed. For a little while she lay watching the sunbeams sliding through the closed blinds, and scattering golden lights here and there. And then came the maid's morning knock at the door.

There was the expected letter in the salver. At the sight of the beloved handwriting her heart gave a throb of joy. The servant drew up the blinds, and let a flood of sunshine into the room. What a bright summer world was waiting for her out-of-doors to-day!

She opened her letter in a leisurely way, dallying with the pleasure that was in store for her. The address was not written quite so firmly as usual. Godwin's clear caligraphy had won a good deal of praise from Mr. Corder and the Miltons, and Beatrice was justly proud of it.

Before she had read two lines, the whole truth burst upon her mind in a sudden storm of anguish. As in a lightning flash, she saw the reason of Mr. Redburn's hurried journey to town. He had gone to see Godwin, and wring from him a promise to set her free. Free!

Were ever fetters better loved than hers? And could all the treasures in the world ever compensate her for those golden love-links that a cruel hand had broken?

To the very last day of her life she would never forget the agony of that morning hour. Godwin, when he wrote the letter, had been thinking more of his own pain than hers. He had been lashed and stung by the old man's insulting words, until the despair of the past had seized him in its grip again. What hope was there for him in the world? If ever he strove to enter the forbidden realm of happiness, there was a terrible "dweller on the threshold," pitiless, malignant, ready to drive him back.

Before Beatrice had got to the last of those miserable lines, her resolution was taken. Her whole nature was up in arms against the remorseless old tyrant who had spoiled the joy of her young life. She was too proud and too strong to be crushed by this sudden woe. Nay, she refused to bear it patiently, as many women of her years would have borne it. Haughty, vigorous, determined, she sprang up from her pillow, and began to make her preparations for hasty departure.

With marvellous speed, she collected her various belongings and heaped them into a capacious dress-basket. Only one thing was left out. Mr. Redburn had given her an Indian bracelet of massive gold; but no power on earth would have moved her to keep a gift of his. The bracelet, in its case, was placed upon the toilet-table, with a brief note addressed to the donor.

Another note was addressed to Miss Lindrick. In a few well-chosen words, Beatrice thanked Alma for her kindness, and apologised for this hasty leave-taking. In two lines she explained the reason of her strange flight. The little letter, although hurriedly written, was not incoherent, and was even penned with a steady hand.

Her box was locked; a direction-label gummed on the lid; and then she proceeded to put on her travelling costume. Giving one last look round the room, and taking up her hand-bag and sunshade, she went quietly downstairs without encountering anyone, and gained the hall in safety.

The house-door had already been unbolted by the servants, but not one of them was to be seen. A sweet, fresh breath of morning met her with a kiss of welcome as she stepped out into the open. The sound of her own footsteps on the gravelled drive made her once or twice believe that she heard someone coming; and she stopped to listen. But not a single human being was in sight.

The end of the avenue was gained at last, and she found herself outside the gates, and in the high road. It was a cloudless day; leaves were whispering in a soft breeze; birds sang joyously; the universal sweetness of fields and blossoms filled the air. She

hurried on, knowing nothing about the trains, and hoping that she should not have to wait long at the railway station. If she were detained, there was a fear that she might be pursued ; perhaps by Colonel Lindrick, acting on behalf of his friend.

The loneliness of the sunlit road was unbroken. Only the boughs were moving, and the delicate leaf-sprays trembling in the hedges. She wished that she knew of some short cut, leading to the station ; but, unacquainted as she was with the by-ways of Fairbridge, there was nothing to be done but to keep to the straight road, and march with all speed. Yet in this wild flight of hers, Fate seemed strangely to befriend her.

She had not gone more than three-quarters of a mile, when the sound of wheels, coming behind, set her heart beating with strong throbs. Had they already discovered her absence, and started in pursuit ? If they had, she must be prepared for a scene ; and again she wished passionately that she could have taken one of the narrow paths that ran across the meadows. The wheels came nearer, blending with the brisk trot of hoofs. She paused, and looked over her shoulder.

It was only a market-cart after all. The driver, a stout country girl, was sitting in front of a load of vegetables, crowned with a few nosegays of homely garden flowers. The sight of her rosy face was welcome enough to Beatrice, and inspired her with a sudden hope.

"Are you going to the railway station ?" she asked, her clear voice ringing out distinctly in the morning stillness. "I will pay you anything you please if you will give me a lift."

The young woman stopped, and glanced at her doubtfully for a moment.

"It's a hard seat, and the cart jolts a good bit," she replied.

"But I don't mind jolting. I want to catch an early train."

"Jump up, then," returned the girl, good-naturedly. "If you don't like it I can easy set you down again." And Beatrice quickly climbed into the place by her side.

She would gladly have been spared the task of carrying on a conversation. But it was expecting too much to hope for silence. The girl talked freely about her personal concerns ; explained that the load of garden stuff was to be sent to a greengrocer by the next up-train ; and asked where her companion was going to ?

"I am going to London," Beatrice answered.

"Then you'll just have time to take your ticket. Train's due at Fairbridge at twenty minutes past nine," said the damsel, shaking the reins as a hint to the stout cob to go faster. "Has your luggage gone on afore you ?"

"It is to follow," replied Beatrice, "Are you sure we shall not miss the train ?"

"Certain sure. Look right across that field, and you'll glimpse

the line. The station's over yonder, behind that clump of trees. When we turn the next corner we shall get there in a minute or two. But you're in a mighty hurry, ain't you?"

"Yes," said Beatrice. And then, thinking that she had given too curt an answer, she added—

"I have had news that makes me take a hasty journey."

"Bad news?" the girl inquired.

"Very bad news."

There was a silence, broken only by the jog-trot of the sturdy horse. A rush of honeysuckle perfume, sweet and overpowering, swept across their faces as they reached the corner. It came from a cottage, laden with creepers from basement to roof, and standing close to the roadside.

"That's where my sweetheart lives," said the rosy-cheeked maiden, glancing towards the door. An old woman, with a white frilled cap tied under her chin, appeared in the porch and nodded smilingly.

"And that's his granny," she added, returning the nod and smile. "Some day I'm going to be married, and we three shall live there together, as happy as birds in a nest."

Beatrice could not help sighing. She, too, could have been as happy as a bird in some humble cottage with Godwin. She had never pined for pomp and luxury. Her good health and simple habits made her indifferent to many of those things which Alma Lindrick prized. She would have faced even poverty bravely if she could have had her love near her heart. But it was wealth, accursed wealth, that had come between Godwin and herself, and separated them, perhaps, for ever. This ignorant country lass, with her open mind and free tongue, was more to be envied, she thought, than the woman who sat by her side.

She rallied herself, and spoke a few kind words to her companion as they approached the railway station. But when she asked what there was to pay, the girl cut her short with a laugh and a shake of head.

"Nothing more," she said. "You've wished me good luck, and that's payment enough for me."

The up-train was signalled. She had just time to take her ticket before it came thundering into the station. The door of a first-class carriage opened and shut: and a few moments later she was on her way home.

As the train rushed on, she caught a glimpse of the high road which she had traversed that morning. A dog-cart was fast approaching the corner where the honeysuckle cottage stood; and she was sure that the grey-haired man, seated beside the driver, was Colonel Lindrick. If it had not been for the rustic lass and her fast-trotting cob, Beatrice must have been overtaken.

In spite of a keen heart-ache, she smiled to think of Mr. Redburn's impotent rage. She had defied and escaped him.

It was not until Fairbridge had been left many miles behind, that Beatrice began to feel her strength was giving way. She remembered, with a sort of dull surprise, that she had not eaten anything since yesterday.

Her early cup of tea had been left untasted by the bedside. She had never once thought of food as she rose and dressed, and packed up her belongings in such wild haste. Nor had she felt the least pang of hunger when she was hurrying along the road to the railway-station. Anguish and anxiety had given her a fictitious strength. But now that the excitement which had sustained her was subsiding, she was conscious of utter exhaustion.

It was a fast train. Station after station was passed, and no one got into her compartment. She was glad to be alone; glad to let her tears flow freely. When she had read Godwin's letter for the first time she had not wept at all. But now, going over it carefully, word after word, she drank the bitter cup to the very dregs.

It seemed to her that it was indeed a final farewell. Mr. Redburn had inflicted a wound that no love-balm could heal. She meant to write to Godwin Earle that very day, and tell him of her flight from Oak Lodge. She would tell him, too, that she had given the old tyrant stripe for stripe, and flung back his benefits into his face. But could all this cure the deadly hurt that had been dealt to the man she loved?

No; the perfect peace and sweetness that he had found in her was utterly destroyed. Even if she won him back—and she did not think that she could—the memory of the old man's cruel words would always be as a cloud between them. Young as she was, she had studied Godwin's character attentively, and knew that there was something of Antonio in his nature. For the past year or two a quiet languor had been slowly creeping over his spirit; and he had held the world

“A stage where every man must play a part,
And his a sad one.”

“Nothing but a miracle will ever set matters right!” she sobbed, with a fresh burst of tears. “Nothing but the clearing up of the mystery of the necklace. And it is absurd ever to dream of an explanation. Unless I can hold the hated thing in my hand and return it to its owner, there is no hope. Unless I can clear his name from this most undeserved calumny, he will never take me back to him again!”

A wiser, more worldly woman would have dried her eyes, remembered her beauty, and thought of fresh conquests. But poor Beatrice was neither worldly nor wise.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WIMPOLE STREET AGAIN.

It was a brilliant season ; everybody worth mentioning was in town ; the weather was all that could be desired. And yet Harriet Milton said to herself that her house seemed unaccountably dull and still.

She missed Beatrice. Although the girl had only been away so short a time, the Miltons were beginning to long foolishly for her return. Perhaps they had caught a little of her superstitious dread of the visit to Fairbridge. Perhaps they were perpetually haunted by their last glimpse of her sad face. Anyhow, there was an unuttered anxiety in the minds of husband and wife, and they had almost blamed themselves for letting her leave them.

The sudden appearance of Mr. Redburn at the office had alarmed Richard Milton. There had been something in the old man's manner, when he had asked for a private interview with Godwin, which had convinced Milton that troubles were approaching. Afterwards, he had seen old Redburn leave the place with an unpleasant smile puckering up his countenance. And he had said to himself that matters had gone wrong—terribly wrong.

Godwin Earle had told him nothing about that interview then. He had rushed past Richard with a haggard face, and left the office to return no more that day.

"I wish I knew what had passed between Redburn and Earle," Mr. Milton had said uneasily to his wife. "I don't like the look of things at all. The child's words are coming true ; she said it would have been better if that old man had stayed in India !"

"Don't be fanciful, Richard," Harriet had replied, rather tartly. "I am so ridiculously unsettled in mind that a trifle frightens me. This is all owing to a warm spring. Our nerves are out of order."

"Mr. Redburn's call had nothing to do with our nerves," Mr. Milton responded gloomily. "I wonder whether there will be a letter from Beatrice to-morrow ? She said something in her last about coming back."

The morrow came, but no letter arrived ; and Mr. Milton went off to the City with a perturbed spirit.

As to Harriet, she made a poor breakfast, and then began to wander about the house like a restless ghost.

Her perambulations led her from the sitting-room into the flowery little yard ; then into the sitting-room again ; and finally out into the hall. She spoke snappishly to William ; picked a living leaf from her pet geranium instead of a dead one ; tripped over one of the mats, and nearly measured her length on the ground.

A strong arm caught her as she stumbled. Looking up, exceedingly ashamed of herself and her unwonted mood, she encountered the steadfast gaze of Mr. Vordenberg.

"You are not looking well this morning," he said, in a tone of kind concern.

"I am well, thank you," replied Harriet, speaking with the frankness which he always seemed to win from her. "But I am worried, absurdly worried, in fact, about Beatrice and her lover."

"What of them, Mrs. Milton?"

"I don't know. My husband and I are much perplexed. We think there has been something unpleasant between Mr. Redburn and Godwin Earle. That Mr. Redburn is a strange old man. He called here yesterday in a hurry, and asked for Godwin's address."

"And you gave it?"

"Yes. Then it seems he went straight to the office in Aldersgate Street, and requested a private interview with the poor fellow. What passed between them, my husband could not tell. Mr. Redburn departed, looking triumphant and extremely disagreeable. And soon afterwards Godwin rushed away without uttering a single word. It looks rather bad, we think; does it not?"

"Perhaps it does. Have you heard from Miss Ward this morning?"

"No; I wish we had. She might have given us an explanation. She, poor girl, was oddly unwilling to go to Fairbridge. But we tried to reason away her reluctance, of course. What else could we do? This Mr. Redburn was her father's greatest friend; and she is bound to consider his wishes, I suppose."

"She is not bound to let him meddle with her private affairs," said Mr. Vordenberg decidedly. "He has no right to come between her and Mr. Earle."

"Not the least right. But why should he want to come between them? It is true that Godwin is not rich, but he has excellent prospects. Mr. Corder seems to treat him as a son. They are not thinking of marrying yet. Beatrice is so young that they may well wait a year or two."

"But he is not very young," Vordenberg remarked thoughtfully. "And he looks as if he had had but little joy in his life. I have never seen a man with that expression who has not known sorrow."

"Oh, I believe he has suffered a great deal. There has been some misunderstanding with his friends; but I have not heard the story. Mr. Corder's son married a Miss Earle, and the Earles never forgave their sister for making such a match. I have always fancied they must be a hard-hearted set. They are living at Fairbridge."

"At Fairbridge! That is where Miss Ward is staying."

"Yes; she has already met them. But they do not know anything about the engagement. Our young people agreed to keep the matter a secret for the present. I think Godwin did not mean to make any declaration until his position was more assured. But love conquered prudence."

"That was not surprising," said Vordenberg, with one of his sad

smiles. "I have been glad to see her happiness," he added. "I never saw but one other girl become so radiant under love's influence. It is a pity to lose one gleam of such rare sunshine. I could never pardon anyone who had deliberately darkened her path."

"Nor I," responded Harriet, frowning thoughtfully. "The dear child is not rich, and I thought that old man's money might make her comfortable. But I will never counsel her to give up her lover for the sake of Mr. Redburn's gold. We were all going on very satisfactorily till he came here and disturbed our peace."

It was a quarter past eleven. Mrs. Milton, suddenly remembering that she had wasted a good deal of time that morning, went off to see after her neglected household duties. Vordenberg opened the hall door, and stepped out into the sunshine with his head full of Beatrice.

As he paced slowly through Cavendish Square, now cheerful with the foliage of the young summer, he recalled her face as it had looked when she had announced the fact of her engagement. Other fair faces were coming and going around him; but he only saw those intense blue eyes shyly gazing into his—only heard the timid voice that told him of her new-born happiness.

Poor child, had she not been afraid of being too happy? He remembered the little song that had saddened her, even in the first throbs of her new joy. Was it possible that those fears of hers were indeed prophetic of parting and pain? Ah, how gladly would he keep every shadow of sorrow away from her young life? What worlds he would have given for some mystic power of controlling her fate, and warding off any influence that was hostile to her peace!

He had promised to be her friend. He had been strangely impressed with the belief that his friendship would be precious to her in some time of need. But how could he work for her when she was miles away? How could he serve her without knowing what service was required of him? If only he had possessed the art of moving her mind at a distance he would have summoned her back at once. She was among strangers, people who could not care for her interests as he would care for them. They would give her no comfort if she suffered; no help if she wanted aid. Oh, that he could put forth some mesmeric force and call her back!

For nearly an hour he walked swiftly through the streets, seeing nothing but the pictures that rose before his mental sight. Then, almost mechanically, he turned his steps homeward again, and found himself approaching the house in Wimpole Street.

He was only a few paces from the door, when a cab stopped in front of the house. His heart gave a wild leap. Could his prayer be answered? Had she returned indeed? But no; there were no boxes; none of the usual signs of a returning traveller; it was only a momentary foolish hope that had so suddenly stirred him.

The driver jumped down and opened the cab-door. For an

instant Vordenberg believed that his brain was playing him a strange trick. This girl, who got out unsteadily, and stared round her with bewildered eyes, shining out of a death-pale face—this girl bore an unearthly resemblance to Beatrice! Was it her ghost? Or, if it was indeed her very self, what had they done to her?

As her gaze met his, a gleam of pleasure flashed across the poor white face; she staggered forward, catching at the arm he extended.

"Mr. Vordenberg," came in a whisper from the pallid lips.

"My child!" he said, supporting her tenderly to the house.

In the next moment the door was opened with his latch key, and he had placed her gently in a hall chair. Her bag was handed in by the cabman, the fare was paid, and the door closed.

Before Harriet could be summoned to her assistance, Beatrice was in a swoon. And Mr. Vordenberg, taking her up in his strong arms, carried her into the sitting-room and laid her on the sofa near the window. Then he withdrew, leaving the women to hover round the helpless girl, and watch eagerly for the first signs of returning life.

A flapping handkerchief, steeped in Eau de Cologne, was busy about her face when she came feebly back into the every-day world again. For a few seconds her dazed brain could not take in the familiar surroundings. She was afraid that this was Alma who was bathing her temples, and feared that her flight from Oak Lodge had been only a dream after all. And then, with a faint thrill of joy, she recognised Harriet's familiar features.

They lifted her up tenderly, as if she had been a child. Harriet left her for a moment, and came back with some brandy and water, which she held to her lips, for to her surprise Beatrice found that her hands were so unsteady that she could not hold the glass herself.

"You must not try to talk yet," said Mrs. Milton softly. "Heaven only knows how glad I am to have you here in safety."

And, fed by those gentle hands, watched by those kind eyes, the girl gradually revived, and lay languidly on the sofa while the sunny day went by. There was a blaze of scarlet geraniums set in the greenery of the little yard; the ivy trailing over the wall seemed fresh and flourishing. Beatrice rested on the couch in silence, and looked at it all.

Nothing seemed to interest her very much, as she lay there patiently and wearily. The pain of her own grief had dulled her spirit, and she could hardly gather strength to rejoice in the sense of security and rest. Vordenberg came many times to the door with whispered enquiries. Harriet sat near the sofa, and could scarcely be induced to leave her charge for a moment.

Just before Mr. Milton returned from the City, Beatrice began to show little signs of restlessness, and to start at the slightest noise. Harriet met a wistful look from the sad blue eyes, and ventured to ask a question at last.

"You are anxious, dear. Is there anything you want to know?"

"Yes : I want to know whether Mr. Milton has seen Godwin to-day ?"

"You will know that very soon. But it is pretty certain that he has seen him."

There was a pause. Beatrice was gathering up her forces to speak again.

"Did he know that Godwin and Mr. Redburn met yesterday ?" she asked, with a great effort.

"Yes ; but he has not heard what passed between them. He could see that Godwin was much distressed."

The girl sighed heavily.

"I could tell what passed if I were strong enough," she said. "Harriet, you must read this letter, and it will explain a great deal. It came this morning. When I had read it, I felt that I could not stay another night at Oak Lodge, and so I ran away. Ah, was I not right to feel afraid of that cruel old man ? He has destroyed my happiness."

"Not destroyed your happiness, only disturbed your peace," said Harriet, reassuringly, as she unfolded the letter. "My dear child, when Godwin knows you are here, nothing will keep him from your side."

"Pride will keep him," was the faint answer. "You will think differently, Harriet, when you have read that letter."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EXILE'S STORY.

To Vordenberg that sunny afternoon was one of the longest that he had ever known. Once or twice, when he went to the door of Mrs. Milton's room, he had caught sight of Beatrice's white face as she lay upon the sofa. What would he not have given to have heard her speak ? He was consumed with an intense longing to know the story of her sorrow. Until he did know it, he could do nothing ; but if all were explained—if the history of the last few days was clearly set before him, he could surely find out some way of bringing back her happiness. A true love is always slow to believe in its inability to help the beloved. It feels strong enough to remove mountains and cut down forests—anything, to make the path easy for those dear feet.

And this love of Vordenberg's, coming late in that sad life of his, was, perhaps, as divine a feeling as poor humanity has ever known. It was the pure gold of affection, cleansed from all earthly dross of selfishness. If he could make the girl's heart beat joyously again he would rejoice, although every throb was for another. He asked for no reward, save the knowledge that she was blest.

The clocks were striking six when he heard them half-leading,

half-carrying her upstairs to her chamber. There was the sound of footsteps moving overhead ; a window was closed, a door shut. He stayed quietly in his lonely room, listening for voices ; but none came. This evening he longed especially for peace and solitude. But who does not know that such a longing is often the precursor of an invasion ? Who has not settled himself for a quiet hour of work or thought, when—

“ Suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping,
Rapping at the chamber door.”

The unwelcome tap came to Vordenberg, and wrung from him an angry murmur of impatience. There was no pause after the knock ; no waiting for leave to enter ; the door was flung open, and a wild figure rushed in. There could be no mistaking the fierce bright eyes, the shaggy hair and beard, the tall gaunt form of Michael Stavieski.

Why had he come this evening of all evenings in the year ? Never had Vordenberg felt so inclined to hate the sight of this unfortunate friend of his youth as he did at that moment. As usual he would begin to harp on the old string, to recapitulate old wrongs, to lash himself into a state of impotent fury, until his listener's patience gave way. Their interview would end, as such interviews always did, with stern words from the one man, and eager apologies and self-reproaches from the other. Vordenberg was sick of it all—sick of this mad rage of patriotism that would stick at nothing in the pursuit of its impossible ends—sick of the long list of bygone injuries. Was there never to be a spell of forgetfulness and peace ?

“Casimir,” said the hollow voice, in a tone that would have made the flesh of an unaccustomed hearer creep. “Casimir, what a sight I have just seen ! I have seen her with my own eyes ; she was coming out of this house, this very house that shelters you, my friend !”

“Why should she not be coming out of it ?” demanded Vordenberg, a little fretfully. “Do not make any noise, Michael ; there is someone ill upstairs. Be as calm as you can.”

“Calm !” repeated Stavieski, flinging up his arms. “Do you know what memories her face has recalled ? Have you forgotten the fate of Wouriski's father, and of my own brother Paul ? Do you not remember who came to old Wouriski's house, and won the confidence of the poor, blind women folk ? Do you not ——”

“For heaven's sake, Michael, let us have no more of these old miseries to-night !” cried Vordenberg, in downright anger. “Are we to be eternally living in the past ?”

“It would seem so, since faces from the past are eternally haunting us,” said Stavieski. “You are not yourself to-night, Casimir. You do not give your heart to my words ; you listen with your ears only.”

"Michael, you are a fool! If you want money—you or Wouriski—there is no sacrifice that I would not make. But if I give you money, I ask you, in return, to respect my desire for peace. You come here, and find me weary, depressed—burdened with the weight of my own sorrows, and you persist in talking of old scenes and old wrongs that have been done with long ago. It is too much. I will not bear it. As to this mysterious woman you have met, I cannot even guess what her name is. I suppose she is some one who reminds you of one of your old enemies, and you are ready to murder her for the fancied resemblance."

"She is a spy!" hissed the Pole through his shut teeth.

"You see spies everywhere. The other day you took William for a spy—a boy who has not two ideas in his head! A little more of this absurdity and you will find your way to a lunatic asylum."

"Not yet—not yet. There is work to be done first."

"Sit down, Michael, and let me reason with you, my poor friend. I am sorry if I have spoken too harshly; but I am weary and sad to-night. Life is short, far too short to be spent in perpetual wrath and bitterness. You speak of work to be done; yes, there are works of mercy always waiting for our hands to do. There are the poor and needy to be helped and succoured. In helping them, are we not curing our own sick souls? Think of these things, Michael, and you will be a calmer and happier man."

Stavieski had seated himself, and was silent. His arms were folded; his head was sunk upon his breast; his whole attitude betokened the deepest dejection.

Vordenberg found his silence almost as irritating as his speech. He began to fidget in his arm-chair, inly wondering how long his visitor meant to sit there and worry him with that dumb show of misery? At last, unable to bear the hush any longer, he broke it by speaking in an aggrieved tone.

"What can I do for you, Michael?" he asked at last.

The bowed head was suddenly lifted; the eyes, full of a gloomy fire, met his eagerly.

"You can listen to me, Casimir. It is not a great thing that I require of you—only a little of your time and attention."

"Go on," said Vordenberg, resigning himself to listen with a heavy sigh. Stavieski began to brighten up at once. He straightened himself, fixed his glittering eye upon his victim, waved his hand, and plunged immediately into a long story.

"It was in the year 1863 that these things happened, Casimir—these things of which I must speak before I rest to-night. You were a fugitive then, my friend; of those whom you had loved so well, very few remained. Your property had all been taken from you and divided amongst your enemies. And he who had the lion's share, was the man who had once pretended to be your friend—the ever-accused Gradizoff."

"Keep your hands still, Michael," pleaded the unfortunate auditor, with a suppressed groan. "And do not curse any more than you can help."

"We who stayed in Warsaw were thinking of you continually," Michael went on. "But we were watched always, watched so that we hardly dared to speak to each other in the streets. At that time Gradizoff had not returned to St. Petersburg; he was living still in the house that had belonged to that unfortunate Lorenski, who was exiled two years earlier. He had taken young Paulina Lorenski, as you know, to live with his wife; and in those days he was newly married and had no child. The girl seemed to live not unhappily in her strange home. She was allowed to go about freely here and there and see the people who had been her father's familiar friends. And so it came to pass that she was often at the house of old Wouriski."

Vordenberg was listening now in spite of himself. Michael, more self-controlled than usual, was telling his story fairly well.

"Old Wouriski lived, as you may remember, with his two daughters, Nathalie and Marie, and his son John. My brother Paul was paying court to Nathalie, and went every day to the house. I did not go so often; my mind was wholly occupied with our great schemes. Even then, under the very eyes of the Muscovites, we were working—working always; and we would not give up our hope. And John Wouriski was one of our boldest spirits, ever cogitating and planning; we put much trust in him and in his active brain. But there came to us, from a sure source, the news that John was about to be arrested; and he fled—there was nothing to be done but to fly."

"Poor John," Vordenberg softly murmured.

"Things went on just in the same way with the Wouriski household after he was gone. We missed him, but we dared not speak much of our absent friends. We were always silent about our beloved ones at a distance in those days. Paul still faithfully courted Nathalie; little Marie was the inseparable companion of young Paulina Lorenski, who came daily to complain of the Countess Gradizoff's temper. We all pitied the girl whose father was wearing out his weary life in Siberia. There was not one of us, who would not have given his right hand for the brave Lorenski's child."

"It is true, Michael; I believe you."

"Paulina was not pretty in those days; she had not the proverbial beauty of our Polish women. But her dark eyes were large and soft, and she was gentle, and won our hearts by her submissive sadness. She was young and weak, and had not the strength to struggle, she said. But her heart was full of wrath against those who had taken away her father; and she would often ask the Wouriski girls whether the Poles had given up all hope? Paul told everything to Nathalie—alas! Casimir, it is a dangerous thing for a patriot to trust in a woman! and Nathalie had few secrets from Marie and Paulina. And so the end came."

"A bitter end, indeed," said Vordenberg, with a deep sigh.

"Even when they arrested old Wouriski and Paul—my poor, foolish Paul—we did not at first suspect the traitress. But there were plain proofs; a letter had been stolen from Nathalie by Paulina's own hand—suspicions became certainties. I was absent from Warsaw when the arrests took place; and when I heard of them, I fled, just as you and John Wouriski had fled before me. There is very little more to tell, my friend. You know how the old man and the young one were sent on the long, weary way that so many brave men have trodden. You know that old Wouriski died upon the journey. But as to Paul, I know not whether he is living or dead."

"My poor Michael, you have suffered bitterly," said Vordenberg, sadly. "But this woman who played the spy—did you not once tell me that John Wouriski saw her in Paris?"

"Yes; she was in Paris a short time ago. After old Wouriski and Paul were sent to their doom, the Gradizoffs went back to St. Petersburg, taking Paulina Lorenski with them. We do not know whether Paulina lived with them always; we have reason to believe that Gradizoff sent her here and there, doing that evil work in which she had already succeeded so well. He gave her money; she must have had savings when he died."

"It is too horrible to think of."

"After his death, which happened about four years ago, she came to England with the widowed Countess and her daughter. But the life did not suit her, and she would not endure it long. She applied to those who were acquainted with the services she had rendered; they listened to her, and sent her to Paris. And there she bloomed out into a new life."

"The life of an adventuress?"

"Even so. Paulina had always a mania for jewels; even as a child she could never resist anything that glittered and shone. Mephistophiles might have won her, easily enough, with that casket which poor Marguerite despised! She was handsomer as a woman than she ever had been as a girl. There was a foolish old man named Valerot, who had made his fortune by speculating on the Bourse. He saw her, loved her, in his fashion, well enough to marry her; and became insane a few months after his marriage. Then—then——"

Michael had started up from his seat, and was pacing the room wildly, swinging his arms in the old excited way which Vordenberg knew so well. His eyes glared fearfully; his face had changed from white to dark-red; his rising fury almost choked him.

"Then, Casimir, she came *here*. By all the saints I swear that these eyes have looked upon her evil face to-night! Listen—listen, my friend. I will govern myself, I will speak so calmly that you shall not know it is your poor Michael who speaks!"

He paused; then paced the floor again with measured strides, and spoke in a quieter voice.

"We share the same room, Wouriski and I. There is nothing left to us but our friendship, and the ties that bind us to the past. This has been a bright day ; it made us think of days in Poland, long ago, when it was summer, and the blood of youth coursed freely through our veins. We had been working hard for hours—toiling for our daily bread, as exiles have to toil—the evening came, and we said : ' Let us walk near the house where Casimir lives, and give him our blessing ; the blessing of those whom he has succoured in their time of need.' "

His tone had become gentle and low ; there was a softer light in his eyes. Vordenberg passed his hand across his face. This gratitude—this gentleness in one so wild—touched him more than words could express.

"There was a carriage standing before the house. The door opened, and a woman came forth. At the sight of her, I thought that Wouriski had become mad. He seized my arm, and hissed her name into my ear ; and we looked at her—looked at her, as if our eyes could never have enough of her face. She was beautiful, with a girlish, innocent beauty, so that no one could guess that she was more than thirty years old. Her hair, no longer dark brown, was cropped close to her head, and shone like red gold. A soft white shawl was wrapped round her shoulders, but not so closely that we could not catch the shine of the gems on her neck and arms. Ah, Casimir, it was a sight that we could hardly see and live ! "

Slowly, while Stavieski was speaking, there had dawned on Vordenberg's mind a vague remembrance of the woman he described. He saw a vision of a peach-like face, round and soft as a child's—of glorious dark eyes—of short-cut auburn hair. He had never thought of asking anyone to tell him this woman's name. His heart was so full of Beatrice, and his love for her was so mysteriously blended with the love of his lost Sofie, that he had no thoughts to spare for others.

Never before had he felt so much inclined to make allowances for this excitable Michael, who had so often bored him with his wild suspicions and impossible schemes of victory and vengeance.

And yet, how necessary it was to soothe the poor Pole, smarting under an internal sense of wrongs that could never be set right on earth ! Vordenberg, too, rose in his turn, and put his arm round Michael's shoulders, as he had often done when they were boys together.

"Michael, my dear old friend," he said kindly, "do not think that I cannot realise what it cost you to see her face ! I am a dreamer, and I take little heed of those who are under this roof—save one. Women go and come, like shadows to me. But, my brother, you must avoid this woman ; you must not come again while she is here." Stavieski uttered a low cry of pain.

"You cannot mean this, Casimir," he said piteously. "She has robbed me of Paul, already—must she take you from me also ?

Must I be deprived of the only consolation left me on earth? Think—I lead a hard life; when I come into this room I breathe a new air; I live my old happy days over again. You are changed, Casimir; but you do not show any of the degrading signs of poverty. You are a type of the interesting exile, who would be petted and caressed in any society—whose sorrow has merely added the charm of melancholy to his handsome face. You have been well compared to Chopin—the refined, spiritual Polish gentleman, who moved in aristocratic circles and fascinated friends and foes. There is a poetic aroma about your music, and all that you do and say. But I—I have none of these attractions. Banish me from this house, deny me the consolation of your presence, and what remains to me?”

An intense pity filled Vordenberg's soul, and blinded him, at that moment, to the real danger of letting his old friend run the risk of again meeting Madame Valerot.

Anything was better than inflicting another wound on that poor scarred heart.

“Well, well, do not distress yourself,” he answered soothingly. “But you must avoid her, Michael; you must never linger near her door a moment. And do not let her catch sight of your face. If she recognised you, she would leave this house at once. Moreover she might have you watched; one cannot tell what power she has. Me she never knew; but you she saw often in the old days.”

“Not as often as she saw poor Paul! Yes, Casimir, I will promise to be cautious. As to Wouriski, he is always on his guard. Good-night, my best friend; I can leave you now that I have unburdened my mind. I know you wish to be alone.”

He left the room, gently and quietly; and Vordenberg went back to his solitary musings.

The story which Michael had just told him had awakened every sleeping memory of the past. He recalled the old days, and the old companions, whose faces were beginning to fade slowly out of his recollection. But there was one face, with clear, true eyes, and haughty features, that rose before him distinctly in the evening dusk. He remembered the open hand, the warm heart, the high courage that no trials could quell—and sighed bitterly over the cruel fate of Demetrius Lorenski.

But although the face of the father came before him clearly enough, he could remember nothing of the young daughter who had found a shelter with Gradizoff. This woman who lived downstairs, might perhaps bear some resemblance to the man he had known so well in former times. If the story which Michael had related were quite true (and he was certain that his poor friend had not lied), then indeed it was well for the proud Lorenski to be in ignorance of the fate of his child. Alas! no one knew whether the Siberian exile were living or dead. If he were living he must be an old man now. It was far more probable that he had ceased to suffer years ago.

He did not doubt the authenticity of any information which Wouriski had obtained. Poor and miserable as he was, Wouriski had his secret informants, and they were not often deceived. There were times when he had thought uneasily about the close companionship of two such ill-used and passionate men as Wouriski and Stavieski. And yet, what harm could they do? They were so poor, so broken, so powerless! And he had much faith in his own influence over those stormy spirits, and believed that he could soothe them into comparative patience and peace.

The evening was rapidly wearing away; night was coming on. He rose and paced the dim room, quietly, and not with Michael's heavy strides. The events of this day had made him restless. He had a strange presentiment that something more important—more startling than anything which had happened yet—was still to come.

He had given so few thoughts to his fair fellow-lodger that he did not even know whether she kept late hours. Michael had seen her going out in evening dress; at what time would she be likely to return? He was possessed with a strong desire to see her face that very night.

The hours went by. Presently William came in to set a lighted lamp upon the table and draw down the blinds. The house was very quiet; Mrs. Milton had gone upstairs to Beatrice, and intended to pass the night on a sofa in the girl's room. What a long, tedious night it would be to that weary young heart, crushed under its heavy load of anguish! To Vordenberg, who had suffered so much, the face of sorrow was as familiar as that of an old friend. But to Beatrice, young, lovely, untried by the sharpest kind of anguish, this grief was terribly new and strange.

He got some books from his shelves; and tried to soothe himself with some favourite poems. But the sweetest verses, new or old, had no charm for him to-night. Why did poets all harp so cruelly on the old strings? Love, Change, Death—were there no other themes? He closed the volume with a sigh of disgust, and took up the latest novel from Mudie's.

But the novelist was as melancholy as the poet. It seemed as if the whole world had only one story to tell, a story of blossoms blighted in their first flush, of a sun that went down while it was yet day. Vordenberg thought of the girl upstairs, and flung the novel from him.

Seized with a sudden longing for the breath of the summer night, he lifted the sash, and leaned out. The air was balmy and still. The scent of the flowers from Madame Valerot's balconies, floated up sweetly, and refreshed him unawares. Cabs and carriages were rattling up and down the street; presently a brougham came driving up to the house. Vordenberg drew in his head, and quickly pulled the blind down again.

It was the work of a few seconds to put on a light overcoat, wrap a silk muffler round his neck, hiding the lower part of the face, and quietly leave the room. He went swiftly and noiselessly downstairs—so swiftly and noiselessly that he almost came into collision with a lady who was just coming up.

Mrs. Milton's house was always well lighted, and the encounter took place under a gas-lamp which illumined the space at the bottom of the stairs. Vordenberg, as he stepped aside and murmured an apology, had a full and distinct view of Madame Valerot.

Paulina Valerot was one of those women who defy all analysis. There were moments in her life when she looked almost as old as she really was. But to-night she had enjoyed herself, and her beautiful brown eyes were still radiant with the light of pleasure. Her soft round cheeks were flushed; a fleecy white shawl was folded so carelessly over the full bust that one could see the blaze of gems upon her neck. Bracelets were flashing on her plump white arms; she wore a pale blue satin gown, that glistened in the gaslight. The childish head, with the short auburn hair, was uncovered; the dark eyes looked up at Vordenberg with a startled, innocent glance.

She went her way up to her rooms, and he passed out into the street, to wander for a little while under the light of the stars. So that woman—so brilliant, so sumptuous—was little Paulina Lorenski, whose father (if he were still alive) was wearing out his days in the Siberian mines. It was not pleasant to think of her, with all those gems on her neck and wrists. He would have been better pleased to have seen a wimple on the bright head, and a crucifix upon her breast. Do men ever think of the price that women pay for jewels? Some of them do; and (even while they bestow the baubles with a lavish hand) they feel that souls are worth more than diamonds.

Walking slowly under those quiet stars, Vordenberg thought of the two girls who were fated to be the chosen loves of his life. One of them, torn suddenly from earth and bliss, had been a saint in heaven for many a year; and the other, lying up there, in that room where a light was burning, was breaking her heart for the sake of another man. Yet far better was such a lot as theirs than that of the woman he had just seen. He turned back to the house again with a bitter little laugh; and a stray verse from Owen Meredith came drifting into his head as he opened the door:—

" Could we find out her heart through that velvet and lace :
Can it beat without rumpling her sumptuous dress ?
She will show us her shoulder, her bosom, her face ;
But what the heart's like, we must guess."

(To be continued.)

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FRANK DADD.

R. TAYLOR.

"IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT YOU MEAN TO KILL ME!"